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Running head: ELEMENTARY TEACHERS OF WRITING

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS OF WRITING:
PATHS, PASSIONS, AND PRACTICES

Amy Huftalin
Reading and Language

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the degree requirements of
Doctor of Education

National College of Education
National Louis University

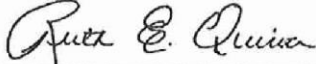
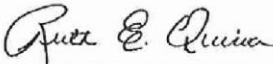
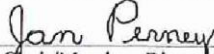
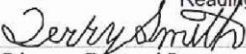
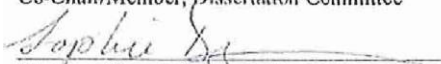
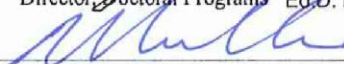
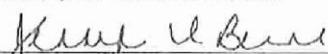
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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the National College of Education

Amy Huftalin
Reading and Language

Approved:

	
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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study examined the personal and professional experiences of early elementary teachers related to writing, seeking relationships between their experiences and instructional practices. Data included a survey of 61 kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers and two focus group interviews in a large urban district in the Midwest. Three major themes emerged from the data concerning the writing instructional practices: (a) the importance of peer collaboration on instructional practices and professional learning, (b) the consistent use of a common writing curriculum, and (c) the application of a Writer's Workshop approach. The findings suggest that because writing is not a consistent instructional focus in schools across the United States, teachers may need to use their autonomy to make it a priority in their classrooms. To do this, they will need strong curricular materials providing embedded professional learning to facilitate the much needed shift in instructional emphasis toward increased writing instruction.

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This dissertation is a culmination of years of work as an educator during which time I was inspired by many. First, I wish to thank my chair, Dr. Ruth Quiroa, for her many hours of guidance, encouragement, and friendship. She helped me find my path toward a topic when I had so many interests from which to choose. She is a brilliant lady and an expert editor without whom this work would not have been completed.

I am also indebted to the rest of my all-star committee, Dr. Jan Perney, Dr. Sophie Degner, and Dr. Jennifer Berne. Dr. Perney kindly guided me through advanced quantitative data analysis and then consented to sit on one more committee before fully retiring. He made thoughtful suggestions while gently instructing me throughout this whole process. Dr. Degner also provided guidance and encouragement along my journey, always with thoughtful comments and expert advice. Dr. Berne provided invaluable insight into the design of this research. As my first doctoral instructors, Dr. Berne and Dr. Degner advised choosing a topic early in the program and sticking with it. My work began with the studies very early in my program and culminates with this doctoral dissertation.

I learned almost as much from my partner in crime, Kim Wagner, as I did from our professors. Our names were often confused at National Louis because we were always together. We insisted on keeping our programs identical and carpooled to every class. Each night on the way home it seemed we had new topics of interest to study. We even thought about trying to write a dissertation together. Kim and I discussed class material, our personal lives, and dreams for our futures. Without Kim, I would not have completed this work.

When I reflect on all my academic efforts over the years, I have one more person to thank; Dr. Lou Ferroli. I took his first class at Rockford University in 1990 for my master's degree and almost every class he taught after that. He inspired me to think deeply and scholarly about education, specifically literacy, emphasizing the value of maximizing every minute with students. We presented at the Illinois Reading Conference together many times and published an article in their journal as well. His influence is imprinted in much of what I do each day.

Finally, but most importantly, I must thank my family for their support of my endeavors. My husband, Carl, always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. He kept things going at home so I could attend class and spend many hours at my desk on the weekends. He made sure I had a dependable car with remote start so it would be warm for the late-night drives home. He never let me doubt my ability to conquer this goal. My four boys, Andy, Nick, Matt, and Mitch took my work in stride by excusing my absence from some of their activities over the years. Their unconditional love and support made it all possible.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, Carl, Andy, Nick, Matt, and Mitch who sacrificed so I could accomplish this dream.

This work is written in memory of Dr. Susan McMahon who helped me begin this journey, taught me so much during coursework, and served on my committee designing this research. Her legacy lives on in me and many other National Louis students.

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
3.1 Mapping of Data Sets and Corresponding Participants	96
3.2 Timeline for Data Collection	102
4.1 Demographics of Survey Respondents	110
4.2 Coding Categories.....	111
4.3 Ranking of Categories.....	113
4.4 Survey Rankings for Teacher Experiences for All Respondents and Focus Group Members	113
4.5 Survey Rankings for Writing Instruction for All Respondents and Focus Group Members	114
4.6 Weighted Averages of Teacher Experiences Related to Writing Instruction	115
4.7 Significant Correlations between Reading Professional Literature and Writing Instruction	116
4.8 Significant Correlations between Reading Professional Literature and Writing Instruction Based on Years of Experience.....	117
4.9 Focus Group Participant Demographics	119
4.10 Ranking of Subcategories by Number of Words	120
4.11 Writing Instructional Practices	129
4.12 Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items about Writing Instructional Practices	134
4.13 Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items about Type of Student Writing Activities	134

4.14 Significant Correlations between the Use of Writing Checklists and Writing Instruction	135
4.15 Significant Correlations between Publishing Writing and Writing Instruction.....	135
4.16 Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items and Student Actions	136
4.17 Significant Correlations between Student Actions and Writing Instruction.....	138
4.18 What Teachers Say about Writing Instruction Common to Both Data Sets.....	148
4.19 Survey Findings Regarding Teacher Experiences and Instructional Practices.....	152
4.20 Focus Group Findings Regarding Teacher Experiences and Instructional Practices	154
4.21 Common Findings for Both Data Sets	157

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Personal Observations and Experiences	7
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose of the Study	12
Research Questions	13
Importance of Research	13
Scope of the Research	15
Organization of the Study	15
CHAPTER TWO	17
LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Introduction.....	17
Theoretical Perspective.....	17
Writing	22
Definition	22
Writing as a Process.....	23
Discourses in Learning to Write	23
Defining the Discourses	24
Applying the Discourses	27

Factors Affecting Teachers' Discourses	28
Reciprocal but Not Equal.....	29
Reading and Writing Assessments.....	30
Relationship of Reading and Writing	31
Time for Teaching Writing	33
Potential to Improve Reading with Writing.....	33
History of Writing Instruction	34
Penmanship, Product, Process	35
The Neglected "R"	37
The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Writing	40
Evidence-based Instruction and Assessment	41
Missing from the Standards	42
Traditions in Instruction.....	43
Content or Correctness.....	44
Teach as You Were Taught.....	45
Form versus Content	46
Writing Instruction in Primary Schools	47
What Writing Instruction Looks Like Today.....	47
Dimensions and Challenges.....	48
Effective Instructional Practices	51
Instructional Modes and Focuses.....	51
Five Key Principles of Effective Writing Instruction	55
Process Approach to Writing Instruction.....	57

The Basics	58
History of the Process Approach	58
Advantages and Disadvantages.....	59
Teachers' Perceptions of Process Writing	60
The Teacher of Writing.....	62
Personal and Experiential Factors.....	62
Collaboration.....	62
Teacher Dispositions.....	63
Self-Efficacy	64
Beliefs of High and Low Implementers.....	66
Negative Personal Writing Experiences	69
The Sting of the Red Pen	69
Theoretical Orientations Toward Writing.....	70
Beliefs about Instructions	72
Factors Affecting Orientations.....	72
Professional Preparation and Development	73
Professional Learning	74
Disparity Between Reading and Writing Coursework.....	75
Competing Value Systems of Teacher Preparation	76
Lack of Writing Coursework Offered.....	77
High Quality Professional Development	78
Tenets of the National Writing Project	78
External Influences Impacting Instruction.....	82

Pressure from the School Environment	82
Time of Fit It All In	83
Pressure of Assessment.....	84
Disconnect Between Assessment and Instruction.....	84
Different State Requirements.....	85
Three Rhetorical Stances	85
Effects of Rhetorical Stances on Assessment	86
Challenges for Assessing Writing.....	89
Effects of Formative Assessment on Instruction	90
Summary	91
CHAPTER THREE	92
RESEARCH METHODS	92
Purpose of Research.....	92
Research Design.....	92
Research Questions	93
Mixed Methods Research	93
Context of the Study: General Setting and Sampling	94
Curricular Context	95
Role of the Researcher	95
Data Collection	96
Quantitative Data Collection.....	96
Qualitative Data Collection.....	98
Ethical Considerations	100

Timeline	101
Data Analysis	102
Survey Data.....	102
Focus Group Data	103
Methods.....	104
Coding.....	105
Analysis and Interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data.....	105
Summary	106
CHAPTER FOUR.....	108
RESEARCH FINDINGS	108
Description of the Survey and Sample.....	108
Representativeness of the Sample.....	108
Preparation for Data Analysis	110
Research Question 1	114
Quantitative Data – Survey	114
Qualitative Data – Focus Group Interviews.....	117
Units of Study/Calkins	121
Curriculum	123
Working with Peers.....	126
Comparing Quantitative and Qualitative Data.....	127
Professional Learning	127
Curriculum	129
Other Findings	130

Summary of Findings from Research Question 1	132
Research Question 2	132
Quantitative Data – Survey	133
Qualitative Data – Focus Group Interviews.....	139
Writer’s Workshop Model/Units of Study.....	139
Conferencing with Students	141
Foundational Skills	142
Shared Writing	143
Reading/Writing Connection	144
Amount and Kind of Instruction	146
Comparing Quantitative and Qualitative Data.....	147
Writing Instruction.....	147
Student Actions	149
Challenges.....	149
Summary of Findings from Research Question 2.....	150
Research Question 3	151
Quantitative Data Concerning Teachers’ Experiences and Instructional Practices	152
Teachers’ Experiences Related to Writing	152
Writing Practices, Instructional Practices, and Student Activities	153
Qualitative Data Concerning Teachers’ Experiences and Instructional Practices	154
Teacher Experiences Related to Writing	154
Writing Instructional Practices	155

Relationships Between Teachers' Experiences and Classroom Practices	156
Summary of Findings from Research Question 3	159
CHAPTER FIVE	161
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	161
Conclusions.....	161
Research Question 1	161
Research Question 2	162
Research Question 3	162
Discussion	163
Peer Collaboration	163
Writer's Workshop.....	165
Curriculum	166
Implications for Practice	168
Limitations	170
Implications for Further Research	171
Final Thoughts	173
REFERENCES	177
APPENDIX A – Teacher Survey.....	188
APPENDIX B – Focus Group Guiding Questions	196
APPENDIX C – Informed Consent for Focus Group.....	197
APPENDIX D – Follow-up Email to Focus Group Participants	199

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a class of kindergarteners sitting crisscross on the rug facing their teacher, eager to hear what she will say next. She is poised to write on the chart paper hanging on the easel in front of the students. It is February, so these youngsters are well aware of the procedures and expectations surrounding Writer's Workshop. They know that they are about to learn something important that they can immediately use in their writing.

"Writers, today I am going to show you how to make the world better. We are going to think of a problem and ways that we can solve that problem. Your words are like magic. You can see a problem in your mind, think of ways to fix the problem, and then write all about it."

The students brainstorm ideas and decide that there are several hallway behaviors that need to be fixed. Sometimes kids run. Children get in other students' lockers. They are noisy when other classes are learning. The hallways sometimes get messy and need cleaning. The class decides that running is the biggest problem. The teacher helps them plan what they are going to write. She talks about adding consequences to problems like, "If you run, the teacher will see you." The class counts on their fingers how many words they will write. The teacher touches where the words will go on the chart paper before she writes them. They stretch out the words together like rubber bands. She reminds them to check the word wall to spell some words. She models spacing and crossing out when they make mistakes ("What do I call it when I cross it out? Edit."). Throughout the transcription she reminds them, "Writers write a little, then read a little." The teacher models how to show feelings in drawings and text. She compares their ideas to a favorite

author, “What would Mo Willems do to show that?” Before sending them off to write independently, she shows them the anchor chart, reviewing what they have learned about writing to make the world better.

This kindergarten teacher helps her students produce amazing writing each day. Her enthusiasm for writing is transferred to her students. They look forward to Writer’s Workshop and complain if they do not have enough time to write. After a typical mini-lesson lasting about ten minutes, the students write independently while the teacher conferences with them individually. She stops to make whole class teaching points during their writing time to highlight great things students are doing or to remind them to use certain strategies they have learned. The 45-minute writing block ends with about five minutes of sharing back on the carpet. The routines, procedures, and language of Writer’s Workshop are well-known to all students and help make the teaching and learning successful for all.

Now imagine seeing this enthusiasm, consistency, and student writing in all classrooms. This particular teacher shares a passion with students that not all educators experience. For many, writing is difficult to teach for a variety of reasons. Their comfort with writing is less than what they feel for reading. They struggle to set consistent routines and language surrounding writing to scaffold student learning. This example teacher makes connections between reading and writing, and ensures these are made explicit during both writing and reading time. When her students move on to first grade, the teachers know them immediately from their writing expertise. Thus, her students enter the next year at an advantage, which unfortunately, not all students experience, namely, the benefits that writing can have on learning across the school day.

For many years, research has provided an abundance of evidence concerning the reciprocity between reading and writing. When combined instructionally, student reading and writing achievement increases (Graham & Hebert, 2011; Shanahan & Lomax, 1986; Tierney & Shanahan; 1991). Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) state that the two are connected because they depend on similar knowledge representations, cognitive processes, and contextual constraints. Knowledge from one can be transferred to the other, and therefore, can be taught more efficiently together. Graham and Hebert (2011) found that when writing, students gain insights about reading as they create texts according to the rules of logic and continually reread what they write. Their meta-analysis of research showed that reading comprehension can be increased by implementing writing instructional programs, and that increasing the time students write leads to improved reading comprehension. Hebert, Gillespie, & Graham's (2013) meta-analysis found similar results when they looked at the effects of different writing activities on reading comprehension. They found that, depending on how closely writing is tied to reading, "writing activities are differentially effective in improving reading comprehension" (p. 111). The results from these meta-analyses demonstrate that a significant portion of research indicates the close connection between reading and writing and the instructional benefits of combining the two.

When classroom teachers are asked about writing instruction though, their reactions undoubtedly vary to extremes. Some educators cringe with discomfort thinking about teaching writing, while others light up, indicating their passion for the practice. Still others reveal a look of bewilderment as they try to consider when they actually teach writing, if at all. If teachers feel anxious about teaching writing, the instruction provided

their students may not be what is indicated as best practices in scholarly research.

Fleischer (2004) stated that in too many classrooms, students are not receiving the kind of writing instruction needed to be successful. She indicated that writing makes many teachers uncomfortable and that they lack confidence in their knowledge of composition. Educators also struggle to integrate best writing practices into the classroom in the face of standardized assessments. Simmerman, Harward, Pierce, Peterson, Morrison, Korth, Billen, and Shumway (2012) also indicated that, “despite decades of focus on effective writing instruction, research indicates that many teachers may not be fully implementing these practices, or they may be using them in ways that detract from their effectiveness” (p. 294). The various struggles teachers face concerning writing processes and writing instruction are indicative of an inconsistency of teaching and learning in elementary classrooms. Without effective writing instruction, the benefits of the reading-writing connection cannot be fully realized.

Perceptions about reading and writing as disciplines develop from the complex, varied paths students take to becoming literate. How people learn to read and write affect their thinking about the teaching pedagogy of the two. Peter Elbow (2004) cites a “deep cultural construction” of the phrase, *reading and writing*, and how it fits into language in this specific order. To say writing and reading sounds odd. As such, thinking about which of these is privileged runs deep in the belief systems of the United States.

The term *literacy* literally means power over letters – that is, over both writing and reading. But used casually (and in government policy and legislation), literacy tends to mean *reading* not writing. The words *academic*, *professor*, and

even *teacher* tend to connote a reader and critic more than a writer, so deeply has the dominance of reading infected our ways of thinking. (p. 9)

Applebee and Langer (2009) extend this thinking about reading and writing in terms of the effects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act.

We are living in an educational era where reading is often considered content-free, where mathematics and science skills and content knowledge rather than ways to think about that content still predominate (although the standards in both subjects call for a broader focus on problem solving and communication skills), and where writing seems to have evaporated from public concern. (p. 27)

This “evaporation” of writing comes as a warning to teachers that the English language arts curriculum in the U.S. short changes writing in frequency, length, and types of writing students do.

Across the United States, writing instruction does not match what research recommends (National Commission on Writing, 2003). One reason may be that reading is favored over writing in instructional time, teacher preparatory coursework, and professional development. Calfee and Miller (2013) state that reading is the top priority in elementary schools, with as much as half the school day devoted to the basal or commercial reader in some instances. Independent reading is emphasized in classrooms and at home, but not independent writing. Even though much research has focused on how writing is learned, practiced, and assessed, little of the data has reached the public or caused educational reform. Reading methodology is also favored over writing in teacher preparatory coursework, with few states requiring courses in writing pedagogy for certification or licensure, while all require reading coursework (National Writing Project

& Nagin, 2006). There are also few dedicated college and university writing courses available for teachers to learn the craft of writing. Not only is reading professional development favored, but the same for writing is traditionally lacking (Roberts & Wibbens, 2010). Teachers seeking professional learning find many more opportunities related to reading methodology than writing. Even though a balance between reading and writing instruction offers significant potential to improve student learning, teacher capacity and classroom instruction unfortunately just do not match this notion.

Additionally, in schools without a clear curricular scope and sequence, writing does not garner the same emphasis as reading. Basal adoptions occur periodically which reemphasize reading instruction, but the same rarely happens for writing. The writing instruction dictated within a basal program tends to focus on writing about or in response to reading, often in the form of assignments rather than instruction. Without proper education and systematic emphasis on writing, the methods of writing instruction seen in classrooms can be eclectic and the amount daily or weekly included randomly as teachers float aimlessly without a clear direction toward best practices.

Another cause for the discrepancy between reading and writing instruction could lie in teachers' attitudes toward writing. In a study of primary student teachers, Gardner (2014) found that young teachers tended to adopt the pedagogy of the schools in which they student taught. His work found that the prevailing affective attitudes toward writing were considered unfavorable for seventy-four percent of the 115 teacher candidates he studied. Some of the words they used to describe writing instruction included "chore, functional, prescriptive, and secretarial." Candidates with negative or very limited writing experiences during preservice coursework and student teaching tended to reflect those

experiences in their own classrooms. Gardner notes that teachers' personal beliefs and experiences with writing inevitably affect how they teach writing and consequently, by extension, their students' approach to the subject as well. These negative writing attitudes further exemplify why the state of writing instruction in schools remains problematic.

Personal Observations and Experiences

The complexities of writing instruction encompass what, why, when, and how educators teach writing on a daily basis. As a literacy leader working with teachers to improve instructional practices, I witnessed firsthand the struggles associated with teaching writing that can prove especially difficult when a teacher lacks the skills and confidence necessary to provide effective instruction. Since the methods, materials, and amount of writing instruction vary greatly across grade levels K-5, teachers on the same grade-level team can also present instruction of varying amounts and proficiency. Because it is human nature to focus on doing things in which one excels or that makes one feel comfortable, writing frequently takes a back seat to reading instruction. This is because educators tend to have more experience and comfort with reading than writing given the overwhelming difference in professional learning afforded the two. Writing, then, is often the first thing deleted from lesson plans when time is short.

My personal experience as a classroom teacher was no different. When I taught first and second grade, my own efforts at writing instruction usually included little more than attempts at occasional creative writing pieces to go along with a seasonal or content-based theme. I graded student work with an eye on grammar and punctuation rather than content. I felt inadequate compared to my colleague who loved writing and excelled at teaching process writing to first graders. Her passion for writing and my lack thereof

resulted in major differences in learning outcomes for children in adjacent classrooms. A deficiency in professional learning about writing instruction compounded my feelings of inadequacy and contributed to a lack of confidence in teaching.

The dichotomy that existed between my own attitudes toward writing instruction compared to that of my colleague presents another question about the state of writing in elementary classrooms in the U.S. There seem to be some teachers who demonstrate a passion for teaching writing and, therefore, excel at providing exemplary lessons for young writers on a regular basis. They find ways to integrate writing across subject areas, use varied methods, and seek to continually improve professional learning around writing. Others, like me, struggle to integrate writing into daily instruction without enough professional learning and significant experiences to guide practice.

My observation of teachers over the past several years has piqued an interest in writing instruction. Educators tend to fall at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to teaching writing: they are either passionate about it or avoid it. Another educator who comes to mind is a kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Ware, (a pseudonym) whose enthusiasm for writing was clearly evident. Each day began with journal writing while the students entered and became settled in the classroom. She held conferences with half of the students each day, listening to, and commenting on their work. She also faithfully integrated whole-class interactive writing around current topics, so that students applied phonemic awareness and phonics skills learned previously, as well as conventions about text. I witnessed her students practice the skills independently as they read and wrote throughout the day. Most significant, though, were comments made by the first grade

teachers that received her students each year, as they always knew which children came from Mrs. Ware's class solely based on their writing skills.

At the other end of the spectrum, exists what seems to be the majority of elementary teachers in the U.S. who lack a passion for teaching writing. For some, it may be evidenced in weekly schedules where writing instruction is obviously missing. Others put writing in their schedule but regularly eliminate such instruction due to time shortages. Recently, when my own school worked to implement Writer's Workshop, many teachers balked at scheduling daily time for writing. Few embraced the practice at first, as the methodology was unfamiliar and required new learning. The first year proved difficult as teachers struggled to implement the new practices. However, by the second year, teachers started to see benefits, not just in their own methods, but also in the writing abilities of students that entered their classrooms with a year of writing instruction and practice under their belts. By embracing the teaching of writing, these educators could balance reading and writing instruction and take advantage of the reciprocity of the two to maximize student learning.

Statement of the Problem

While the state of writing instruction in classrooms cannot be completely explained through high-stakes testing, these assessment measures do present a concerning picture. For years, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results have painted a less than favorable picture, with students performing consistently below proficiency in writing at all levels (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003; Salah-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008). In 2011, 54% of eighth grade students performed at a basic level on the NAEP writing assessment and only 24% performed at a proficient level (National Center

for Educational Statistics, 2012). Such results indicate that writing instruction does not garner the time necessary to make students successful. The National Commission on Writing states, “Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years” (National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 3). Factors compounding this problem include environmental aspects such as a lack of time in the day for providing instruction, changing technologies, and programs and practices that emphasize standards and assessments, all of which serve to cripple writing as part of the curriculum (Applebee & Langer, 2009). As schools are increasingly pressured to raise test scores, teachers are often forced to focus on areas that are tested, and “teach to the test.” They feel compelled to try to schedule increasingly more into each school day, and often must conform to rigid school curriculums and mandates that confuse day-to-day instruction. In addition, mandated assessments, whether inclusive of writing components or not, shape much of what teachers do in their classrooms. In reference to standardized testing, Smagorinsky (2010) states that educators “are not teaching writing except when preparing students for the writing component” (p. 299). Writing achievement is inherently difficult to measure and, therefore, comes and goes on state and national assessments. If schools do not value writing instruction, teachers may not put forth effort into gaining the skills necessary to become effective teachers of writing.

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), writing instruction may have some new hope. Educational leaders have urged change for years, but these standards represent the first major reform effort in the U.S. since the National Commission on Writing argued for instructional improvements in 2003 (Graham &

Harris, 2015). Shanahan (2015) states that one of the biggest advantages of the new standards lies in their emphasis on a closer connection between reading and writing. While past standards treated the two disciplines separately, the CCSS require teachers to adjust instruction to meet the required integration. By placing writing front and center, the standards may help educators refocus attention on writing through grade-level benchmarks and integration across all disciplines. The value of the CCSS will be limited though, unless teachers understand the importance of writing instruction (Graham & Harris, 2015). Universities and businesses alike have expressed the need for improved writing skills for youth entering the work force. Graham & Harris (2015) label writing “an indispensable tool for learning in school and beyond” (p. 460). The CCSS intend to prepare students to be college and career ready, and teachers and schools are charged with the job of implementing them and deciding how to include more writing instruction across the school day.

Research clearly shows the importance of writing, but what continues to stand in the way of improving daily instructional habits for improved student outcomes? Teachers hold the ability to make many decisions which determine the effectiveness of daily instruction given that they control much of what goes on behind classroom doors on a daily basis. The magnitude of effect teachers may have on students depends on several factors, including their attitudes toward teaching, their own education, and their willingness to work with others to improve their own instructional practices. These instructional elements that educators do control greatly influence what teaching ultimately looks like daily. Teachers, therefore, hold the keys to improving writing instruction in primary classrooms across the United States.

Purpose of the Study

A recent study by Harward, Peterson, Korth, Wimmer, Wilcox, Morrison, Black, Simmerman, and Pierce (2014) highlights some of the factors causing the wide discrepancy among how individual teachers implement writing instruction. These researchers studied teachers categorized as either “high implementers” or “low implementers” of writing instruction, identifying several themes that affected instruction, namely, hindrances, helps, teacher beliefs, teacher practices, and professional development (including teacher preparation programs). The results of the study showed significant differences between how the two groups of teachers dealt with issues of instruction. The high implementers sought out help for problems and celebrated successes. Low implementers, on the other hand, tended to blame weaknesses in instruction on outside forces. They also displayed a lack of confidence in themselves as teachers of writing and seemed to project this attitude onto their students. The differences in attitudes between effective and less effective writing teachers exemplify a significant roadblock to consistent writing instruction across elementary school classrooms.

The purpose of the Harward et al. (2014) study was to explore the reasons that elementary school teachers engage in writing instruction or not. They hoped their results would “help other educators understand positive instructional factors that may potentially make a difference in K-6 students’ writing and negative factors that can potentially be avoided” (p. 219).

The current study seeks to extend the learning from this research by examining the personal and professional experiences of writing teachers and how those experiences relate to their classroom practices. Developing a better understanding of how teachers

become passionate about writing may lead to the discovery of common writing practices evident in classrooms. Studying such differences in teachers may be the key to improving the state of primary writing instruction in U.S. schools by affecting preservice teacher preparation, as well as in-service teacher education. Thus, the current study endeavors to identify common experiences and practices of primary elementary writing teachers that may be replicated as key aspects in educator preparatory, advanced studies, and professional development programs.

Research Questions

This mixed-methods research study focuses on primary writing teachers' personal and professional experiences affecting writing instructional practices. It will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional experiences of early elementary (K – 2) teachers related to writing?
2. What do these teachers say they value about writing instruction in their classrooms and why?
3. Is there a relationship between these teachers' writing experiences and their classroom practices in writing?

Importance of the Research

This study is of particular importance given the general state of education in the U.S., particularly since higher demands fall on the shoulders of teachers that require decisions about how best to use each minute of the day. With the assumption that reading and writing are connected processes, it seems possible that teachers may be able to improve the effectiveness of instruction on student outcomes by connecting the two.

However, this requires that advances be made in the amount and quality of writing instruction in elementary schools. In 2003, the National Commission on Writing highlighted the need for a “writing revolution”, urging more time be devoted to writing instruction, training for teachers, measurement of writing results, and writing across every curricular area. After all these years, though, writing remains the most neglected of the three “Rs.”

In 2015, *The Elementary School Journal* devoted an entire issue to the CCSS and writing. Graham and Harris (2015) introduce the journal articles by stating that,

While these standards have generated considerable controversy within and outside the educational community, the benefits of CCSS for writing far outweigh any potential limitations. At the most basic level, the implementation of CCSS should result in more writing and writing instruction in schools. (p. 457)

The adoption of the CCSS offers an attempt to improve education across the U.S. with common goals and expectations for students. While these standards do not prescribe what and when specific skills and processes must be mastered, the benchmarks for writing give direction for designing instruction for students. Their authors recognize that writing is a challenging skill to teach and that educators must know the what, when, and how of instruction. Thus, the CCSS provide a roadmap and may be the best impetus in recent years for starting that writing revolution.

Yet the standards alone cannot guarantee changes in instruction. Teachers play an important role in ensuring the implementation of best practices. Consequently, this examination of primary writing teachers attempts to uncover factors affecting instruction such as writing dispositions, personal and professional learning, components of

instruction, and instructional environments, among others. These factors may then be considered by school administrators and teachers when planning for improved writing instruction.

Scope of the Research

This research study employs a mixed methodology including surveys and focus group discussions for the purpose of investigating teachers' experiences and classroom practices related to writing instruction. It was set within a large urban public school district in a Midwestern city consisting of 28 elementary schools, with a poverty rate of 83%. Student ethnicities are divided mainly between three subgroups: 32% White, 30% Black and 27% Latino. The intent of the research was to provide an in-depth understanding of writing teachers and their practices through analysis of descriptive survey statistics and themes emerging from discussions of writing. The mixed methodology offers some generalizable quantitative data about primary writing influences and practices as well as providing some voice to individuals with qualitative data analysis.

Organization of Study

This study is presented in five chapters, the first of which introduces the background, problem, and research questions. Following this brief description of the study, Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature pertaining to writing instruction in U.S. elementary schools, together with the theoretical framework within which the research is situated. This review examines research on teacher education, the effects of writing assessments, and writing instructional practices. Chapter Three contains details of the research methodology and data collection. Chapter Four will presents the

study findings and data analysis, and Chapter Five presents conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order to find ways to increase the amount of quality writing instruction in U.S. elementary schools, it is important to look at the current state of instruction and the factors that have influenced teaching in the past. Instruction in schools often does not match what research dictates as best practices. Despite obstacles, some teachers have overcome the odds to become effective teachers of writing. By examining their paths toward embracing writing, it may be possible to identify practices to replicate in teacher education and professional learning.

This literature review examines research related to writing in elementary schools, including the history and traditions that have influenced such instruction. It focuses on the discourses around learning to write, which can be categorized into different patterns of instructional practice that can be applied to a framework for research. Specific teacher-based factors affecting writing instruction are also analyzed, as well as the effects of assessment on instruction. Finally, research on writing instructional practices is presented with specific emphasis on the process approach to teaching writing.

Theoretical Perspective

Current writing methodology draws from a cognitive perspective on learning, linked to theory from the early twentieth century when educators sought to explain how and why learners processed new information. In contrast to behaviorism, cognitive theorists based their claims on the idea that prior knowledge and mental processes played a larger role in learning than responses to environmental stimuli. As a result, they viewed

learning as an active process of acquisition and reorganization of information that occurs in different ways for each individual. This cognitive approach focuses on “making knowledge meaningful and helping learners organize and relate new information to prior knowledge in memory” (Yilmaz, 2011, p. 205).

Cognitive learning theory draws on the work of not one, but several major theorists. Yilmaz (2011) credits the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky as inspirations for the constructivist movement. While Piaget took a cognitive constructivist stance and Vygotsky one of a social constructivist, both agreed that ideas must be constructed from personal experience in order to have meaning for students (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Piaget believed that humans cannot just be supplied with information to learn, but must construct their own knowledge. Vygotsky, on the other hand, thought social actions involving language, culture, and interactions with a more knowledgeable other were key for student learning.

The ideas of both theorists resulted in several important implications for the classroom. The cognitive principles lend importance to instruction that is authentic and real, together with an environment that promotes exploration by students. Teachers should tailor lessons to individual student needs, considering variable backgrounds, interests, and experiences. S/he should also be concerned with ensuring that students construct their own meaningful contexts rather than participate in the rote learning of skills. Cognitivists believe that students learn by receiving, storing, and integrating information before being able to output the learning in a sensible form. This theory of learning provided the basis for the earliest work related to process writing.

Prior to cognitive learning theory, learning to write was thought to occur as a stage process model in which writers proceeded in a linear fashion through steps of pre-writing, writing, and re-writing (Rohman, 1965). This overly simplified model was widely taught in schools at the time but failed to recognize the recursive nature of the writing process. Hayes and Flower (1986) described instruction under this model as follows:

Writing instruction used to be simpler. When we (the authors) learned to write in school, we were given good models to imitate, the opportunity to practice, and red-penciled corrections from the teacher. This kind of instruction is described as product oriented because it focuses on the written product the students produce rather than the processes by which they produce them. (p. 1106)

Writing was not so much taught; instead, teachers presented writing by an emulation of strong writing models which students were meant to produce. In an exaggerated sense, good writers were thought to be born rather than created in that the process could not be taught since written products were simply produced by replicating models.

Emig's research (1971) of the composing processes of twelfth graders also proved seminal to current theories about writing. She found that the rigid parameters teachers set for composition requirements and resulting evaluations restricted students' flexibility. In addition, she found that teachers emphasized correctness over content.

Most of the criteria by which students' school-sponsored writing is evaluated concerns the accidents rather than the essences of discourse – that is, spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and length rather than thematic development, rhetorical and syntactic sophistication, and fulfillment of intent. (p. 93)

This research validated Hayes and Flower's view that writing instruction at the time focused on a correct product.

A shift in emphasis from this product-oriented instruction began with the so-called "process movement" (Hayes and Flower, 1986), in which researchers began to look at what students do when they write. Emig's (1971) critical research studied how much time students spent planning, reading, outlining and revising their writing. Linda Flower and John Hayes' research sought "to model the organization of cognitive processes with particular emphasis on both planning and revision and to translate research into teachable problem-solving strategies" (Flower, 1985, p. 1106). Studying the thinking processes of writers resulted in Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive processing theory, which was based on learning from individuals in the act of writing. Using think-aloud protocols, they could analyze the details of what goes on in the mind of a writer during the act of writing. This theory explains a set of hierarchical processes that each writer organizes during the act of writing, which can be embedded within one another and occur at any time throughout writing. Contrary to popular linear models at the time, Flower and Hayes found that writers do not proceed following a sequential set of steps. Their research also revealed three major elements affecting the act of writing: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing processes. According to their model, the writing processes of planning, translating, and reviewing take place under the control of a monitor that causes writers to continually reflect on the processes they are using while writing, information in their long-term memory, and the task at hand. This theory helped explain writing as a recursive rather than linear process.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Donald Graves conducted his own groundbreaking research on process writing at the Atkinson Academy in rural New Hampshire. Graves and two research assistants, Lucy Calkins and Susan Sowers, studied elementary students and educators in order to develop new writing instructional methods that inevitably helped shape the process/workshop approach. Thomas Newkirk (2013b) reflected that, “At that time, almost no one thought young children could write – really write. There might be the ‘shape book’ or the Halloween story. But regular writing, if done at all, was reserved for the upper grades” (p. 1). He described how Graves and colleagues’ research reimaged the teacher’s role in writing instruction:

Writing instruction at the time of the Atkinson study, if it occurred at all, was tightly regulated. Topics were assigned; all errors were marked; outlines required for all longer papers; a structure (five paragraphs) imposed; all papers graded; no readers other than the teacher. In lower grades even the words to be used were written on the blackboard.

(Newkirk, 2013b, p. 6)

Graves felt that these methods not only relegated the student from that of a writer to a compliant participant, but that they also took away the need for students speak to a real audience. His research moved teachers into a more responsive role through individual conferences with students about their writing. Students were given control of their writing by being allowed to write on topics of their own choosing. These effective teaching methods lead to a “practice” of teaching writing that revolutionized how educators thought about instruction. “It was this practice that Graves outlined in his book, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Graves, 1983), unquestionably the most

significant contribution to elementary writing instruction in the history of American education” (Newkirk, 2013b, p. 8). In a recent review of the state of writing instruction in U.S. schools, Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) described the “enduring elements of good writing instruction” which resulted from this early research as students needing protected time to write, choice in their writing topics, and feedback about their writing.

The implications of the cognitive process theory changed how educators thought about teaching writing. The fundamental shift in emphasis from the product to the processes caused important instructional implications. By acknowledging the variability of individual writers, the writing processes could be separated into components and taught. This model also changed ideas about the role of the student in writing, since it emphasized that all students could be writers by using inventive powers and accessing and using their knowledge of topic, audience and writing plans. This groundbreaking, cognitively oriented research in writing theory focused on the interconnections among thinking, learning, and writing (Hayes & Flowers, 1986) and lead the way for the work of other researchers concentrating more specifically on writing instruction and assessment, such as Murray, Graves, and Calkins who devoted their lives to the exploration of process writing.

Writing

Definition

Writing as a tool fulfills many functions in society. Few would argue as to the power and importance of writing, illustrated by the phrase, “The pen is mightier than the sword,” coined by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839. This is because writing helps us communicate across space and time, provides a means of preserving history and heritage,

serves as a tool for persuasion, and allows us to convey knowledge and ideas with accuracy and detail (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006). People write emails, posts, blogs, and tweets in a society dominated by social media. They write for job applications, to pay bills, make grocery lists, personal communications – all as functions of daily life. People write to entertain the masses with books and scripts. A variety of other occupations requires writing for the daily functions of business. The importance of writing as a discipline begins early in a child's life as scribbles and progresses to more formal writing later as competencies in literacy increase. The process of learning to write is challenging but necessary in order to function in a society dominated by words.

Writing as a process. Children start writing before they ever come to school, and they have experiences to relate and thoughts to develop. The job of educators is to help them transform their thoughts to words on paper. Emergent writing practices must be fostered by thoughtful, consistent practices to take children from where they are when they enter the doors and help them grow as writers. Roberts and Wibbens (2010) note:

There is more to young children's writing than simply drawing pictures, spelling, and handwriting. Children are composers of text well before they begin writing, and there is no reason to stifle composition while mastering the physical and mechanical aspects involved in written language. Our youngest writers need and deserve to be familiarized with the concepts and meaning that writing creates and conveys. (p. 200)

How teachers approach writing instruction affects learners of all ages.

Discourses in learning to write. An examination of the beliefs and practices teachers hold about writing and writing instruction can give valuable insight toward

improving instructional practices. In 2004, Ivanic set out to analyze the theory and research behind the teaching of writing. His research resulted in a framework of six different discourses that can be used to categorize teachers' beliefs about writing and learning to write. He defined these discourses "as constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs" (Ivanic, p. 224). Depending on which discourse a teacher follows will determine her patterns and methods of writing instruction.

Defining the discourses. The importance of the Ivanic's (2004) discourse framework lies in its description of how teachers are positioned to talk about and teach writing, as well as how educators become aligned with others participating in similar discourses. The first of the six discourses, *a skills discourse*, is one in which teachers believe writing comes from the knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the syntactic patterns of texts. This approach to teaching writing involves explicit instruction with a heavy emphasis on phonics. "Good writing" is deemed to present correct words, sentences, and text structure, along with an emphasis on handwriting, spelling, and punctuation. Ivanic believed that this discourse may lead to a disconnect between the teaching of reading and of writing due to its focus on linguistic skills rather than the demands of context.

A creativity discourse comes next in the framework, and signifies a belief in the importance of the writer's creativity to produce writing originating from topics of the author's own interest. This approach often stems from an enjoyment of the literature valued by their teachers, who are also most often writing teachers as well. Instructional

approaches include implicit instruction like that following the philosophy of whole language and language experience approaches. Students learn to write by writing and are assessed according to content, writing style, and imagination. In this discourse, writing has a value of its own, and most content derives from students' personal experiences.

The *process discourse* is the third in Ivanič's (2004) framework, and focuses on the belief that writing results from a combination of the composing processes in the students' minds, as well as the practical processes of creating text. Related instructional approaches include explicit instruction in the elements of the writing process such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Ivanič questions whether this approach to teaching writing can really be assessed.

When the focus in lessons is so much on the process, it seems perverse for the assessment to remain with the product. On the other hand, the process is really only a means to an end: the point of learning and improving the processes involved in writing is in order to improve the quality of the end result, not for their own sake. (p. 231)

Ivanič viewed this approach as a dominant discourse that is extremely widespread in the United States and can be combined with various other discourses for teaching writing.

Characterized by a set of text-types, the *genre discourse* is the fourth in Ivanič's framework. This approach to teaching writing emphasizes learning the features inherent in different types of writing. Texts vary linguistically according to their purpose and context and according to the formality of the situation. "Good writing" is judged according to appropriateness and correctness. Ivanič describes the discourse as follows:

This approach to teaching has attracted strong opinions from teachers, policy makers and researchers, both positive and negative. On the one hand, it is seen as logical, systematic, down to earth, and teachable: the opposite of ‘woolly liberal’ thinking about writing, as many dub the ‘creative self-expression’ approach. On the other hand, it is seen as prescriptive and simplistic, based on the false view of text-types as unitary static and amenable to specification. (p. 234)

This view of writing is concerned not just with the form of the text, but also with the social factors surrounding the writing event.

In the fifth discourse, that of *social practices*, the “writing event” underlies the importance of teachers’ beliefs about writing. Here the text and the writing process are seen as inseparable from the social context and social purposes for writing. Because writing is viewed as a social practice, the pedagogical practices associated with this discourse are more indirect than those previously described are. Students learn to write implicitly as the writing event is embedded within a broader sociocultural context of writing. The social meanings, values of writing, and issues of power are particularly important within this discourse. Writing is assessed according to the effectiveness of achieving a purpose within a social goal. Students may learn to examine research and write as ethnographers in order to produce purposeful, communicative pieces of writing.

The sixth and final discourse outlined by Ivancic (2004) describes beliefs set in sociocultural and political contexts, and is titled the *sociopolitical discourse*. It “is based on a belief that writing, like all language, is shaped by social forces and relations of power, contributes to shaping social forces which will operate in the future, and has

consequences for the identity of the writer who is represented in the writing” (p. 237-238). This critical literacy approach to teaching writing is characterized by the explicit instruction in different types of writing, along with the corresponding sociopolitical explanations and consequences. Ivanic sees assessment of writing within this discourse to analyze the extent to which it achieves social equality and responsibility among participants in the community.

Applying the discourses. Research by McCarthy, Woodard, and Kang (2014) show that teachers negotiate multiple discourses and apply them to personal beliefs, curriculum, and professional development. Their study of 20 teachers used Ivanic’s (2004) framework to examine teachers’ beliefs about writing, instructional practices, and contextual factors. They found that teachers’ discourses do not fall into one particular part of the framework, but often reflect more than one. This research shows how teachers negotiate the varying discourses and resulting tensions when beliefs do not align with district mandates or curriculum.

Ivanic (2004) indicated that a comprehensive view of writing pedagogy includes elements from all six discourses. A teacher trying to combine them all, though, would inevitably face some tensions and contradictions while planning and implementing writing instruction. He thought that individual lessons might integrate two or more approaches, while the overall curriculum may cover all six. While Ivanic suggested that teachers benefit from knowing the discourses and associated teaching practices, McCarthy et al. (2014) argued that it is also useful to know the dominant discourses presented in district adopted curriculums. This knowledge leads to questions about what outside factors influence the discourses teachers apply to the teaching of writing.

Factors affecting teachers' discourses. After defining and applying the different discourses of writing, knowing the outside factors that affect teachers' beliefs can provide useful information for improving instruction. McCarthy and Mkhize (2013) conducted a study of teachers in four different states to determine their orientations toward writing and the forces that influence those orientations. They found three elements affecting writing instruction: school context, programs and material, and assessments.

The first influencing factor, school context, included students' socioeconomic status, the percentage of English learners (EL), and the pressure to perform on high-stakes tests. McCarthy & Mkhize (2013) examined whether teachers from high and low income schools exhibit different orientations toward teaching writing by looking at how they taught rhetorical style, voice, reading-writing connections, grammar and mechanics, and sentence construction. They found that teachers from demographically diverse schools emphasize different features of writing. Teachers from low-income schools often felt pressure to pass tests rather than focus on providing "thoughtful writing instruction" (p. 22). Instruction in these schools often emphasized grammar, mechanics, and sentence construction. Conversely, some teachers from high-income schools reported that they felt protected from those same pressures as their students usually performed well on tests. The number of ELs also affected teachers' orientations as they often reported low expectations for student writing and a lack of knowledge about best practices for teaching writing to ELs.

Another factor McCarthy and Mkhize (2013) found affecting teacher orientations was the program or materials they used to teach writing. Teachers in schools who were offered a choice of materials talked favorably about how the programs

influenced their instruction. In some of the low-income schools, though, the mandated, scripted writing curriculum produced negative feelings toward instruction. No matter the program, the materials influenced the way teachers talked about and approached writing instruction--whether they were given the choice of materials and the freedom to make instructional decisions or not.

Finally, their research identified assessment as a significant influence on teachers' orientations, particularly given an increased emphasis on state assessments and the use of rubrics to judge writing. Teachers reported aligning instruction to assessments and teaching "more authentic writing *after* the state tests" (McCarthy & Mkhize, 2013, p. 29). The emphasis on assessment of writing generally resulted in a negative effect on morale and the willingness to teach outside of the curriculum.

Reciprocal but Not Equal

Writing falls under the umbrella term "literacy" along with reading and even though the two are related, they are often treated very differently instructionally. "Literacy is a key competence for contemporary life, and is one of the key intellectual infrastructural elements differentiating our way of life from that 5,000 years ago" (Bazerman, 2008, p. 1). The term "literacy" refers to the processes of reading and writing and how the two are combined in order for humans to make sense of their world. In the field of education, research has often focused on aspects of reading in order to determine how students gain meaning from the abundance of texts that make up their world. Other reading studies have examined functional literacies that assist daily living, literary studies on the analysis of complex texts, and critical and cultural analyses regarding beliefs and identities.

The study of writing, on the other hand, has not received the same emphasis in research and consequently, on the classroom. Bazerman (2008) wrote of this dichotomy as follows:

There is a fundamental absurdity in teaching literacy as reading without little writing. It is like asking children to learn language only by listening and never talking. If one only listens, lack of enthusiasm, disengagement, and alienation are likely to ensue. Language becomes a tool for things to be done to you rather than a tool that enables you to do things. (p. 2)

Bazerman questions how educators can separate reading and writing when the act of writing is the process that allows students to become “more deeply engaged in reading, to enter into dialogue with the literate world” (p. 2).

Research demonstrates that the processes of reading and writing are reciprocal in nature (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Shanahan, 1984). Yet the delivery of instruction in classrooms consistently indicates that more time is spent teaching reading than writing. The next section will examine trends in reading and writing research with instructional implications.

Reading and writing assessments. Applebee and Langer (2009) studied trends in reading and writing in secondary schools within the context of NAEP performance levels. The long-term data from 1971-2004 shows near parallel lines of stationary achievement for reading and writing, indicative of the high correlation between the two. In surveys asking students about the amount of writing completed for English class, results showed a gradual increase through about 1992 when the trend seemed to level off. At that time, “...40% of twelfth-grade students reported *never* or *hardly ever* writing papers of three

pages or more for their English language arts classes” (p. 21). The gains in the frequency of writing showed a significant drop between 2002 and 2007 for Grade 8, potentially due to the disproportionate increase in an emphasis of reading over writing on high stakes tests during this period. While data in this study shows small, significant increases in writing instruction over the years, the inconsistency relates to a continuing issue of inequity between reading and writing.

Relationship of reading and writing. Shanahan’s (1984) study of the nature of the reading-writing relation explored learning to read and write at the elementary level. The analysis of assessments of reading and writing at the second and fifth grade levels showed a significant stability of relations during those years. However, the findings did not support the idea that reading instruction alone could sufficiently teach writing, or vice versa. Instead, the findings of this study supported a reading-writing relationship that demonstrated changes over time, suggesting that the instructional integration of the two could have positive gains for both.

The finding that the reading-writing relation changes with reading development suggests the possibility that writing curricula could be directly integrated into those materials currently used for the teaching of reading. A program, so designed, would necessarily have to teach some aspects of literacy related only to reading or only to writing. But in those areas with substantial overlaps, integrated instruction might allow for maximum achievement for both reading and writing, with maximum efficiency. (p. 475)

Donald Graves (2002) also wrote about the relationship between reading and writing:

We forget that writing is the making of reading. Children who write apply phonics, construct syntax, and experience the full range of skills inherent in authoring a text. Writers are more assertive readers and are less likely to accept the ideas and texts of others without question since they are in the reading-construction business themselves. (p. 2)

In a day in age where every minute of the school day represents precious time, the efficiency of integrating reading and writing seems to be an instructional necessity rather than a whim depending on the teacher or the educational setting.

Support for balancing the amount of time spent teaching writing came in a report issued by the National Commission on Writing (NCW) in 2003 titled, *The neglected “R”: The need for a writing revolution*. The Commission issued several recommendations about instructional practices including increasing the amount of time students spend writing, assessing writing progress, the use of technology in the teaching and learning of writing, and teacher professional learning about best practices in writing (National Commission on Writing, 2003). The amount of time students spend writing, or the lack thereof, was a consistent theme in the literature about instructional practices. Graham and Hebert’s (2011) meta-analysis of the impact of writing and writing instruction on reading also revealed several recommendations that supported just such a writing revolution called for by the Commission. Their results showed the “...positive impact of writing about material read, writing instruction, and increased time spent writing” (p. 736). Like Shanahan (1984), they asserted that writing instruction should not replace that of reading, rather that writing interventions could strengthen students’ reading. The researchers also warned that the effects of writing and writing instruction on

reading would not be as significant if the time spent writing was sporadic or without instructional support.

Time for teaching writing. Cutler and Graham's (2008) survey of primary grade writing teachers' instructional practices also supported the NCW's (2003) recommendation related to an increase in the amount of time students spend writing. Their study showed that teachers reported the median amount of time students spent writing as only 20 minutes, a very small percentage of the school day. Similarly, the 1998 NAEP report found that in forty-four percent of fourth grade classrooms, teachers only spent between one and three hours per week on writing instruction. This research indicates the inequality between instructional time devoted to writing compared to reading. Cutler and Graham emphasized that the effects of writing reform would be decreased unless attention is given to how often writing practices are implemented.

Potential to improve reading with writing. The close relationship between reading and writing implies that writing could be used to strengthen students' reading. Graham and Hebert (2011) examined the effectiveness of using writing as a tool to improve students' reading. They developed three research questions about the relationship, the first on whether writing about material read enhances comprehension. Here they found that students in grades 2-12 benefit from writing activities such as extended writing, summary writing, and asking and answering questions. All these instructional methods improved students' reading comprehension.

Secondly, the researchers examined whether writing instruction improves reading, and found that while not identical subjects, teaching writing does have a positive effect on reading outcomes. Finally, they wanted to know if extending the amount that students

write would improve reading, and again their findings demonstrated that “typically developing” students in grades 1-6 show positive effects from increased writing. Graham and Hebert (2011) concluded that:

The positive impact of writing about material read, writing instruction, and increased time spent writing reported in this review is especially notable. While writing and writing instruction should not replace reading instruction, the writing treatments we assess here provide teachers with additional proven tools for strengthening students’ reading. (p. 736)

This research again concurs with Shanahan’s (1984) suggestions that the instructional combination of reading and writing can produce positive outcomes for both.

History of Writing Instruction

The history of writing instruction has not followed a clear, sequential path but rather has proceeded from an emphasis on handwriting, to a written product, and to the writing process. The instructional practices employed in classrooms most often stem from teachers’ own personal histories surrounding writing (Grisham & Wolsey, 2011; Hawkins & Razali, 2012). By understanding educators’ histories of not only writing instruction and personal paths to literacy allows teachers to reflect on major influences on daily instructional practices.

Much of what has been studied and published about writing instruction in the United States addresses secondary and university classrooms, with little focusing specifically on elementary age writing (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Hawkins & Razali, 2012). While some of the research on upper grade instruction can be applied to elementary classrooms, writing does not develop at the same rate or with the same

purposes for younger children as it does for older students. One way to begin looking at the history of writing is to do so by starting with how instruction has been defined and changed over the years.

Penmanship, Product, Process

Hawkins and Razali (2012) summarized the history of writing as a tale of three p's: penmanship, product, and process. Their account started in the early 1900s when writing was most often referred to as the physical act of putting pen to paper to record the transcription of spoken thought. Before students were allowed to write their own compositions, they were trained to copy from models or write in response to dictation with an emphasis on learning spelling, grammar, and punctuation. By the 1930s and '40s, the term penmanship became a part of writing instruction and was renamed handwriting. At this time, teachers began to teach handwriting and grammar within the context of original compositions. By the 1930s and '40s, the term penmanship became a part of writing instruction and was renamed handwriting.

The next step in the history of writing revolved around written products that became interwoven with handwriting early in the twentieth century as students copied models of text to produce a product. Because the models were often oral, the work reinforced the idea that writing was simply the transcription of thought (Hawkins & Razali, 2012). Later, when students were required to write short, original compositions, the purpose evolved toward an evaluation of the usage of proper English conventions.

Hawkins and Razali (2012) relate details of movements toward substantive changes in writing instruction in the 1920's and 1930's when educators began to emphasize self-expression over the conformity and imitation of copying models,

particularly in relationship to the work of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

These progressive ideas may have sparked the NCTE to decry what they deemed the *reign of red ink*, and in its place publish a 1935 report entitled *An Experience Curriculum in English*. This report condemned the mechanistic and formulaic methods of traditional approaches. It recommended that formal grammar training be abandoned in favor of teaching grammar within the authentic context of composing. It also advised that students should write about real-world experiences instead of utilizing teacher-assigned prompts or copying models. (Hawkins & Razali, p. 310)

As progressive as the ideas were in 1935, remnants of traditional teaching methodologies remained common practice well into the 1970's. Elementary language arts textbooks still emphasized teaching writing skills at the word or sentence level, as opposed to focusing on students' ideas (Hawkins & Razali, 2012). Even today, the red pen remains alive as many teachers continue to stress the assessment of form and mechanics over content in student writing (Smagorinsky, 2010).

In the 1980's, this form of inauthentic writing was called into question with the influences of the whole language movement, of emergent literacy, and of process writing, as well as the formation of the National Writing Project (Hawkins & Razali 2012). The research of Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins, which was heavily practitioner-oriented, had enormous impact on the shift away from product to process writing instruction (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Overall, the 1980's showed a strong movement toward

teaching the writing process. However, writing products regained some emphasis at the end of the century with scoring systems like 6+1 Traits (Culham, 2003) and writing exemplar papers for high-stakes tests (Hawkins & Razali, 2012).

The writing process movement, while heavily influenced by researchers like Graves and Calkins in the 1980's, took hold in part due to the research of Emig (1971) who studied products of written composition of high school students and Flower and Hayes (1981) who looked at the composing processes of individual writers at the secondary level. This work led the way for the studies of Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986) on the processes individual students at the elementary level use while writing. The teacher's role in instruction transformed from one of an evaluator of writing to a facilitator. While their research began in the 1970's and 1980's, process writing did not take hold in classrooms until the 2000's. With the increase in emphasis on accountability, many schools looked for packaged programs to guide literacy instruction. In 2003, Calkins and Colleagues wrote *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum (K-2)* which simplified the writing workshop process into a more standard form for teachers' use and also satisfied administrators' need for a prepackaged program (Calkins & Colleagues, 2003).

The Neglected "R"

In 2002, the College Entrance Examination Board formed the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. This group was created partially due to the imminent addition of a writing component to the SAT, but more importantly to address the concerns of many that the state of writing in the United States was lacking. This Commission in turn came out with the infamous report, *The neglected*

“R”: *The need for a writing revolution* (NCW, 2003). The report highlighted the educational value of writing which was defined as “...a complex intellectual activity that requires students to stretch their minds, sharpen their analytical capabilities, and make valid and accurate distinctions” (p. 13) which clearly involves more than just a mastery of grammar and punctuation. The group claimed that in order for students to realize their potential, writing instruction needed to be placed “squarely in the center of the school agenda” (p. 6).

The Commission outlined four challenges to their call for a writing revolution, the first of which was time. Instructionally speaking, writing is a subject that requires a great deal of time to develop students’ skills at differentiating between genres, organizing thoughts, drafting, and revising all the while mastering the concepts of grammar and punctuation. Teachers are charged with providing such instruction, often squeezed within the blocks of time allotted to other subjects. Elementary teachers are typically responsible for teaching and assessing the writing of 25-35 students, alongside all the other content areas, within an already packed school day. High school English teachers typically face the overwhelming task of instructing and responding to the compositions of over 100 students. Although writing instruction does require more emphasis in school curriculums, time must be dedicated for this to occur.

The Commission’s second recommendation involved the evaluation of writing results. The emphasis placed on standards and high-stakes assessments in this country in the past two decades has required schools to measure student achievement in all areas. Measurement and evaluation of writing presents several problems for teachers and school districts. First, until the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, writing standards

varied from state to state, particularly at the elementary level. Even if standards existed, the emphasis placed on teaching writing compared to other “more important” disciplines such as math, reading and science, paled in contrast. Secondly, the expectations of teachers, unless carefully trained in evaluation, also varied across the same standards. The assessment of writing tends to be subjective in most cases, so training teachers in consistency is essential but also takes valuable time. Finally, the Commission stressed that students’ writing abilities cannot be effectively assessed with a single piece of writing under a given set of test conditions. The nature of writing requires allowing students time to plan, draft, revise, and edit which normally does not occur in test settings, further emphasizing the challenging nature of the assessment of writing, as well as the limiting factor of time.

The third recommendation set forth by the Commission focused on the technological factors changing writing and writing instruction. Computers have revolutionized the writing process; no longer must students retype entire compositions or wrestle with correcting tape. Internet research places knowledge literally at students’ fingertips. The processes of generating, organizing, and editing text have been transformed by technology. These changes can provide additional motivation for writing as students raised on keyboards find comfort in sharing their knowledge on a variety of platforms.

The increased technology, while mostly beneficial, presents new challenges for teachers and school districts. Educators must stay current with new advances in software, hardware, and instructional practices. Equity of access to technology remains a struggle as schools and homes do not all provide the same availability to all students. Although

the benefits offered by technology are high, they must be continually assessed in order to bring the most rewards directly to students' writing.

Finally, the Commission emphasized the challenges policy and pedagogy present to teaching writing (NCW, 2003). The report highlighted the need for more training for teachers in order for necessary changes to occur. Instruction is difficult and teachers typically receive little in the way of college course work or professional development focused on improving practices. Pietro Boscolo (2008) wrote about three challenges that teachers face when teaching writing: continuity, complexity, and social activity. These dimensions of instruction present significant challenges for teachers and will be discussed further in reference to current practices in primary schools.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Writing

The adoption of the CCSS has been met with quite a bit of controversy within educational, political, and societal forums. Many experts feel that these standards will actually help promote writing in U.S. schools. Graham & Harris (2015) state that despite concerns about corresponding assessments, "...we think the benefits of CCSS for writing outweigh the potential limitations" (p. 459). Shanahan (2015) highlighted the more integrated approach these standards take to the teaching of reading and writing as compared to past standards. He feels that the standards require teachers to adjust instructional practices to be more efficient and effective at teaching the two disciplines. In her latest book on the subject, Culham (2014) notes that, "Writing has finally taken a place at the big family table with reading and math" (p. 10). She hopes that the standards will cause more teachers to finally integrate reading and writing, but like anything else,

they must be examined with a critical eye and compared to what research reveals about best practices for the instruction of writing.

If the writing revolution called for by the National Commission on Writing occurs, the CCSS may be the impetus for changing how writing is taught in today's classrooms. Graham & Harris (2013) warn that teachers must know the potential limitations the standards may represent. For example, the writing objectives set at each grade level represent educated guesses as to what students should be able to achieve, and therefore, present possible problems.

These objectives lack precision and accuracy and encourage the belief that the same goals are appropriate for all students at each grade. We think this is misguided, as some goals will be too easy and others too hard, depending upon the veracity of the benchmark and the competence of the student. (p. 4)

The standards may end up failing as a tool for teachers to improve the state of writing if educators do not understand how students develop as writers, how to teach writing effectively, and the importance of writing as related to other required disciplines.

Evidence-based instruction and assessment. One limitation of these academic learning standards is that they do not address how to deliver instruction given their focus on what should be taught. With the adoption of the CCSS, not only are teachers required to adjust their instructional content, but must also be aware of how the content will be assessed as well. With respect to instructional practices, Troia and Olinghouse (2013) compared evidence-based practices to the content of the Common Core State Standards for Writing and Language (CCSS-WL). They found that some practices with a strong

research base were not indicated as important in the standards, while others with limited research were supported across all grades levels. For example, free writing, process writing, and strategy instruction all have strong research supporting these practices (Graham, 2006; Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012; Graham & Harris, 2013), but are not mentioned in the standards. On the other hand, there is limited research to support the instruction of grammar, revising, and editing but all these are included in the CCSS K-12. Their conclusions emphasized that educators must not rely solely on the standards for instructional practices but must also turn to other sources of information for what works best for writing instruction.

Missing from the standards. Educational standards often emphasize important areas for instruction but are rarely comprehensive enough to provide adequate support to teachers. In terms of writing, several contextual aspects were left out of the CCSS such as sharing writing, receiving and giving feedback, and using mentor texts and graphic organizers. All of these practices have garnered the support of research and teachers must be sure not to discontinue their use just because they are not indicated by the standards (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, & Olinghouse (2014) also point out that in the early grades, the conventions of writing beyond grammar-related skills are given little regard in the standards. Teachers are left to decide when to teach writing conventions like capitalization, punctuation, and handwriting.

Another important aspect of writing for students is motivation. Hayes and Olinghouse (2015) note that,

Motivation is important throughout the writing process but its most important impact is getting people engaged in writing at all. People may lack the motivation

to write for many reasons. For example, they may not see a purpose for it in their lives or they may associate it with negative consequences. Without the motive to write, writing will not happen. (p. 482)

The CCSS do not address goals, attitudes, self-efficacy or effort as part of the writing process that research demonstrates can directly affect writing outcomes (Graham & Perin, 2007). Teachers can promote motivation in a variety of ways by affording students choice in topics, purposes, and audiences while providing encouragement and feedback to increase student productivity in writing (Graham & Harris, 2015; Mo et al., 2014).

Traditions in instruction

Another powerful influence on writing instruction is related to the differing theories of writing instruction that may stand in contradiction with teacher beliefs and practices. In a study of primary grade writing instruction, Cutler and Graham (2008) found that there is considerable variability in the writing practices seen in classrooms across the United States. Instruction may include a variety of skill and process approaches to instruction or a mix of the two. Among some examples of effective practices include instruction in fluency, form, accuracy, revision conferences, free writing, explicit prewriting instruction, scaffolding of informational writing, and response to literature (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013). While not an exhaustive list, the scope indicates the challenge teachers may experience sorting through what the research identifies as best practices in writing instruction and how to apply them in the classroom. Educators often must decide on their own the methods that are best which adds to doubt and confusion. The task is clearly daunting just considering the number of options available. This leads to an educational system with little or no continuity in the teaching of writing, often

without an identifiable scope and sequence or clear set of curricular materials (Culham, 2014).

Content or correctness. A common conflict teachers face when deciding on a writing philosophy pertains to the debate over content versus correctness. In a study of teachers' theoretical orientations toward writing instruction, Graham, Harris, MacArthur, and Fink (2002) identified two basic orientations: a natural learning approach and a skills-orientation approach. The natural learning method of teaching writing was characterized by less formal, incidental learning, with a focus on meaning and process instead of form. This method shared many of the principles of the process approach to writing. The skill orientation emphasized more "explicit and systematic instruction, as well as correct performance" (p. 151). Teachers' beliefs about instruction may lead to an emphasis of one orientation over the other or a combination of the two.

Hillocks (2005) completed a meta-analysis of research from 1963-2002 revealing that teachers more often focus on form and device rather than content during writing instruction. The research also showed that the teaching of content-related inquiry actually produced more gains in student writing. The conflict can be described as follows:

Historically, there has been a tension between two distinct emphases in teaching composition: one that focuses on formal and external aspects of writing such as grammar, usage, sentence structure, and style; and another that focuses on meaning, ideas, expression, and writing processes. In most classrooms today, teachers draw from both approaches. (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006, p. 15-16)

Without sufficient educational preparation in the area of writing, some teachers often solve this tension between grammar and content by reverting to teaching in the manner in which they were taught in their own K-12 education (Grisham & Wolsey, 2011).

Research now shows that writing instruction emphasizing content results in higher student achievement in writing, but that the majority of classroom instruction across the U.S. does not follow this pattern (Hillocks, 2005).

Teach as you were taught. Until the 1970's, reading was taught before writing. When writing instruction occurred, it emphasized "correctness" (Haley-James, 1982; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Educators in today's schools may continue to teach using the instructional methods they experienced despite what research indicates to the contrary. The uncertainty and tensions discussed previously can cause teachers to revert to traditional methods and previous experiences (Fleischer, 2004). According to Smagorinsky (2010), these traditions are ingrained in many teachers:

Because students are immersed in conservative school cultures throughout their K-12 education, exposed to authoritarian teaching and learning relationships in universities, and offered few concrete alternatives for their instruction in writing at universities, it should come as no surprise that when they return to schools they most often default to the same form-oriented approaches to teaching writing to which they were exposed as students and through which they were most often apprenticed during their field experiences and student teaching. (p. 299)

Again, this research points to a lack of education for inservice teachers and preservice teacher candidates that leads to reliance on traditional, familiar instructional methods.

Form versus content. Form-oriented teaching can reduce writing instruction to what could be called the “sudden release of responsibility.” Instead of modeling and scaffolding student writing, teachers may focus on making assignments and commenting on grammatical errors. With these methods, students learn to write in superficial ways with a focus on grammar and conventions instead of on the development of content and ideas (Hillocks, 2005).

Marie Clay (1982) illustrated one such example of teaching form and correctness as she observed a first grade teacher “facilitate” a writing experience following a filmstrip. The teacher checked the students’ understanding of the film while they drew pictures of “sasafroons” rich in details from the story. Then the teacher instructed the class to start writing their compositions, all beginning with “My sasafroon...” The teacher circulated around the room helping the students compose their ideas that gave them the expectation that a perfect written copy was required. Clay (1982) stated that “consequently, the children’s theory of writing would be, in part, that the correct form lay somewhere outside them, and that the initiative would not be theirs” (p. 67). Teachers may scaffold students’ writing toward a predetermined product so much so that they actually prevent original thoughts or assign writing without any instruction expecting a certain form. Either way, the emphasis on form and correctness results in artificial learning by the students about how to compose text independently with heavy reliance on teachers for providing the expected content.

Writing Instruction in Primary Schools

Many students perform below grade level expectations on writing assessments (Applebee & Langer, 2009). An examination of current writing instructional practices provides a better understanding as to the state of writing in K-12 classrooms in the U.S.

What writing instruction looks like today. Little research existed in the early 2000s about writing instruction in elementary schools. Cutler and Graham (2003) surveyed teachers across the United States to determine common instructional practices related to writing so as to determine whether teachers emphasized a process approach, a skills approach, or a combination of the two. Their questionnaire of a random sample of 294 teachers provided information about the teachers and their classrooms, attitudes, perceptions about writing, and instructional practices related to writing. The researchers hypothesized that teachers would report using a balanced, eclectic approach to writing instruction. The results showed that three out of four teachers reported a combined process and skills approach to writing instruction. Teachers indicated they emphasized basic writing skills like spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation, as well as several practices common to process writing like revision, conferencing, sharing, and monitoring writing. While teachers used various methods to teach writing, the approaches were not balanced between skills and process. Teachers applied traditional skill instruction more often than those associated with process instruction. Also of interest was the considerable variability in how often practices were applied. They found the results troubling and concluded: “Efforts to reform writing instruction are likely to fall short, if little attention is devoted to how frequently practices are implemented. This needs to be the focus of both preservice as well as inservice professional development efforts” (p.

916). Their results provided support for those discussed previously in this chapter by the National Commission on Writing (2003) which called for increasing the amount of time devoted to writing instruction, using technology to teach writing, improving teacher preparation for teaching writing, and monitoring student progress in writing.

Additionally, the researchers called for a more balanced approach to teaching writing, providing activities that promote a motivation for writing, and making a connection for writing between home and school.

Dimensions and challenges. Learning to write is an experience that children begin before formal schooling commences (Dyson, 1995). The traditional writing strategies accepted by many primary school teachers are based on the conviction that writing is an academic discipline that must be taught separate from other school subjects starting in first grade (Boscolo, 2008). Marie Clay (2002) echoed this idea.

The Cinderella of the literacy world is surely early writing. There are probably many reasons why it is neglected but the most obvious is a common belief that children must learn to read before they learn to spell and then subsequently they will learn to write.

(p. 97)

This notion has been questioned by the work of Dyson (1983, 1995) whose research of preschool children shows children engaged in writing from early ages in an effort to make sense of their complex daily lives.

In a study of kindergarteners' early writing processes, Dyson (1983) observed how children develop as young writers. She found three components of construction to be recursive and overlapping: message formulation, message encoding, and mechanical

formulation. These components may or may not occur each time a young child writes. For example, she noted that sometimes children are only concerned with the formation of a message and thus make long strings of letters or curvy lines. Other times the components may occur in an unusual order beginning with the written message, followed by the decoding and message formulation. Her findings also suggest that children's writing develops from some form of drawing to some form of language. In terms of literacy education, Dyson (1995) wrote that teachers must view children as young authors trying to construct coherent, meaningful texts with cohesive words. This all occurs within a social context:

If we as teachers take seriously a vision of writing as negotiating relationships, and if we acknowledge the sociocultural complexity of children's lives, then we cannot write our pedagogical goal as the production of any one language style (e.g., language in which ideas are made explicit in tightly constructed prose). (p. 29)

Boscolo (2008) suggests that the research on writing in primary school involves three dimensions, with three corresponding challenges that may present problems for the teaching of writing, namely, continuity, complexity, and social activity. Continuity refers to how students' writing develops over time and does not occur in a linear fashion (Hayes & Flower, 1986), but rather as an interwoven development of drawing, speech, and orthographic systems in which children learn to express thoughts, ideas, and experiences. As children progress through school, they learn not only the skills and strategies of producing written communication, but also the various meanings and purposes for

writing. The challenge for educators in this dimension is knowing how children's writing develops and maintaining appropriate expectations along the way that drive pedagogy.

In Boscolo's second dimension, referred to as the complexity of writing, he states that children at young ages demonstrate different cognitive and linguistic processing capacities that affect their ability to write. The challenge to instruction comes here with the comparison between the traditional skills approach to teaching and process-oriented instruction. In traditional instruction, the product is judged for complexity. In process-based instruction, the writer's competence to acquire cognitive strategies and self-regulation matter most. Motivation and interest in writing also figure into the dimension of complexity in terms of how students respond to instruction.

Boscolo's final dimension of teaching writing centers on the social activity surrounding instruction, and the subsequent learning that occurs because of these social actions. He indicates several important aspects related to the social nature of writing including dialogue, peer collaboration, interactions with others, and becoming a member of a writing community. Boscolo writes that "...writing is a social activity that can represent a source of engagement for a child, who perceives it as meaningfully connected to his or her multiple experiences in the classroom community" (p. 294).

In sum, Boscolo's three dimensions and their corresponding challenges underscore that learning to write is a continuous experience starting before school begins and continuing throughout life. Students do not move through distinct stages of writing development, nor should writing development be confused with the stages of the process writing (Graves, 1983), or the stages of spelling development (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2016). The dimensions of, and challenges to instruction are not

independent of each other and can occur at any time during the learning process.

Learning to write is facilitated by “meaningful writing tasks and contexts in which children are allowed to interact” (Boscolo, 2008, p. 294).

Effective instructional practices. According to the National Writing Project and Nagin (2006), “...writing is hard because it is a struggle of thought, feeling and imagination to find expression clear enough for the task at hand” (p. 9). It follows, then, that teaching writing is also a difficult, complex process. While research has identified evidence-based practices to support writing outcomes, these methods are not widely exercised in many classrooms (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). It seems that while the research is clear, dissemination of the information to teachers in classrooms remains problematic. For example, The National Writing Project has been in existence for almost four decades with a history of providing exemplary professional development (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Yet despite their core mission of improving writing and learning in U.S. schools, little of the new data and understandings around best practices in writing have reached the general public or been used to inform educational reform (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). In order to assist teachers in implementing best practices, they must first realize what effective writing instruction looks like.

Instructional modes and focuses. In an effort to determine effective writing practices, Hillocks (1984) completed a meta-analysis of experimental studies from 1963 through 1982 under the premise that effective practices could not be labeled solely according to the focus of instruction, but also to the delivery model. Thus, he employed four modes of delivery, presentational, natural process, environmental, and

individualized, to categorize writing instruction and identify the instructional emphases common within each.

The presentational mode can be described as instruction with clear objectives outlined by the teacher in which lecture and teacher-led discussions dominate the classroom. The means of emulating models, imitating a pattern, and following rules direct how students learn to write. Hillocks identified this mode as the most common form of instruction in secondary schools and universities at the time. The natural process mode is characterized by more general objectives set by the teacher with students garnering much more control of their learning. Free writing for peers, as well as feedback and interaction among students predominates this mode of delivery. The teacher acts as a facilitator of learning providing a low level of structure with few models of predetermined quality, and students generate most of the ideas, criteria, and forms in this mode.

The environmental mode of learning can be described as a combination of the first two as the teacher facilitates learning with specific objectives but minimizes lecture and teacher-led discussion. The materials and problems selected are meant to engage students with one another through small-group discussions. Concrete tasks make objectives clear to students as they decide how to pursue their learning, and to set criteria for writing products. This mode of learning places teachers and students in balance, "...with the teacher planning activities and selecting materials through which students interact with each other to generate ideas and learn identifiable writing skills" (Hillocks, 1984, p. 145). Hillocks described the fourth mode as individualized writing instruction, with the most important distinction being that instruction helps students learn on an

individual basis. Here students gain understanding through tutorials or programmed learning, with the focus of instruction varying widely across the studies.

The results of Hillocks' study show that the mode of instruction affects how well students learn to write. Effective instructional practices identified here are different from those commonly practiced in schools and colleges. He writes,

In the most common and widespread mode (presentational), the instructor dominates all activity, with students acting as the passive recipients of rules, advice, and examples of good writing. This is the least effective mode examined, only about half as effective as the average experimental treatment. (p. 159)

He found the environmental mode to be the most effective as it brought teachers and students together in a balance, taking advantage of materials and resources in the classroom. It also places high priority on student engagement within structured, problem-solving activities around the writing process.

Hillocks also looked at several common focuses for instruction that presented important implications for writing: grammar instruction, mechanics, the study of models, sentence combining, inquiry, and free writing. He found that the study of grammar showed no effect on improving writing quality and asserted that,

School boards, administrators, and teachers who impose the systematic study of traditional school grammar on their students over lengthy periods of time in the name of teaching writing do them a gross disservice that should not be tolerated by anyone concerned with the effective teaching of good writing. (p. 160)

He noted that in some instructional models, the emphasis on mechanics and usage can negatively affect student writing.

The use of models in the teaching of writing produced weaker effects than other treatments, although it still proved to be significantly more effective than grammar instruction, as did free writing. Next, Hillocks reported that sentence combining was shown to be an effective strategy in a large number of studies. He concluded that when students work to build more complex sentences, the effects at improving writing quality are twice that of free writing. Students using scales, criteria, and questions to examine writing can have positive effects on quality as this enables them to internalize these tools for use in subsequent writing experiences. Sentence combining and scales as treatments were twice as effective as free writing for improving writing.

Finally, inquiry focuses were defined as the attention students give to strategies for dealing with sets of data used in writing. Examples included stating vivid, specific details, developing and supporting explanations, and analyzing and supporting arguments. As a treatment, this method was almost four times as effective as free writing and two and a half times as effective as the study of models for improving writing quality. Hillocks noted that while the results for the individual treatments varied greatly, those less effective still have a place in the writing curriculum.

Indeed, sentence combining, scales, and inquiry all make occasional use of models, but they certainly do not emphasize the study of models exclusively. Structured free writing, in which writers jot down all of their ideas on a particular topic, can be successfully integrated with other

techniques as a means of both memory search and invention. (Hillocks, 1984, p. 161)

Hillocks' study emphasizes the many complexities of teaching writing that includes the delivery of instruction, the balance of control between students and teachers, and all the various instructional focuses (and combinations thereof) that impact the learning and quality of student writing.

Five key principles of effective writing instruction. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) conducted a study to identify research-based principles of effective writing instruction. Through the use of interviews, they sought the expertise of seven leading authorities in the field of writing including Linda Flower, Steven Graham, Karen Harris, Jerome Harste, George Hillocks, Thomas Newkirk, and Peter Smagorinsky. Five major themes resulted from the analysis of these interviews that offer practical suggestions for educators in the field. The first principle is that writing teachers need to be writers themselves, as they recognized the need for teachers to develop self-efficacy and confidence as writers in order to be effective teachers of writing. By experiencing and modeling the struggles of writing, teachers can help shape students' experiences with writing in a positive manner. Roberts and Wibbens (2010) concurred with this suggestion by stating that teachers must be writers before they can teach writing.

The next principle suggested the need to provide instruction that encourages motivation and engagement in the writing process. All seven leaders emphasized the importance of motivation, but one also connected the idea of using writing to get students invested in learning.

Many students are not very interested in much of what is emphasized in school, but these are kids who have loads of activities in which they excel. They are very interesting people with very deep passions and even if they don't seem to care about school, they care a lot about other things, many of which involve literacy. If there were a way to harness that in schools and rethink school so that the kinds of literacy practices that kids take on voluntarily could become more a part of how they're assessed in school, I think schools would be richer for it. (Smagorinsky as cited in Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012, p. 348)

Not only is it important for teachers to engage students in writing, it can also be a compelling vehicle for motivating and engaging students in education.

The third principle highlighted the need for clear and deliberate, yet flexible planning. Teachers must have an end goal in mind before they plan for instruction. Objectives must be clear not only for the teacher but for the students as well. The scholars also recognized the importance of taking advantage of serendipitous writing opportunities in the classroom, emphasizing the balance between being organized yet spontaneous in order to provide strong writing instruction. The next belief was the requirement to provide daily writing instruction and time for students to practice. Harste called for uninterrupted daily writing time and Graham commented on the need to double or triple the time students write. They reasoned that by creatively providing opportunities to write across the curriculum and using technological innovations like blogs or podcasting, teachers can increase the amount of writing students do on a daily basis.

The final principle of effective writing instruction focused on providing a scaffolded collaboration between teachers and students. The support teachers give students depends on knowing every child and their individual needs. Karen Harris gave the example of assigning someone a job without providing the necessary tools to complete the task. Instruction in writing must come before making writing assignments. Teachers need to know how to look at writing samples and plan instruction accordingly to take students to the next level in their writing.

The importance of providing effective writing instruction cannot be emphasized enough. Because an inconsistency in instruction has plagued U.S. school systems despite research on best practices, teachers must work toward following the principles laid out by experts in the field of writing. This is not an easy task and has not magically happened over the years. Educators need support to improve, as Cutler and Graham (2008) assert, “Efforts to reform writing instruction are likely to fall short, if little attention is devoted to how frequently practices are implemented. This needs to be the focus of both preservice as well as inservice professional development efforts” (p. 916).

Process approach to writing instruction. Research from several meta-analyses of writing instruction have shown a variety of beneficial writing practices including explicit instruction in planning and revising, paragraph and sentence construction, word processing, and the study of writing models. The instructional method in the best position to cover these practices may be process writing (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Many teachers now use this approach or in combination with other methods to develop students’ writing.

The basics. Since its beginnings in the 1970s, process writing has evolved in definition, emphasis, and practice. Early on, it was viewed as a nontraditional model that did not usually involve direct instruction from the teacher. It was applied mainly to narrative writing, was linear and prescriptive, and valued process over product (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Roberts & Wibbens (2010) defined process writing as “the practice of writing or writing instruction that involves a recursive five-part cycle that includes prewriting or planning, drafting, editing, revising and publishing” (p. 193). Students are encouraged to write for real audiences and have ownership over their writing while working in collaboration with teachers and peers in a supportive environment (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Hillocks (1984) labeled this method the natural process mode in which teachers acted as facilitators of instruction. Instruction during this era could be described as simplistic: “After their teacher describes the four stages, students recall and rehearse the steps, use the process to produce a story, and get into groups to share their stories and gain feedback” (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006, p. 276). Today, most researchers recognize that the method consists not only of procedures, but strategy instruction as well, including activating prior knowledge, self-regulation, genre study, revision and editing, and writing for an authentic audience. Instruction includes feedback from teachers and peers to improve writing quality.

History of the process approach. Process writing, often promoted through the pattern of instructional practice called Writer’s Workshop, gained popularity as a method for teaching writing in the late 1970s and 1980s predominantly due to the work of Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins (see Graves, 1983; Calkins, 1986). Their ideas about planning instruction originated from considering how professional authors write and comparing it

to how writing instruction occurs in schools. They called for a balance between writing processes and products, and their research resulted in the adoption and mandate of this method for writing instruction for many schools in the 1980s (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). During this time, teachers were urged to favor using children's texts as models for writing and move away from teaching writing as part of basal instruction (Hawkins & Razali, 2012).

Even though process writing was thought to dominate classrooms from the 1980s through the 2000s, the method did not take hold in many classrooms. Numerous critics felt the method was too loose, an almost anything goes approach, in which process trumped product (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Some schools came to favor programs like 6+1 Traits (Culham, 2003), due to its inclusion of assessment rubrics and scoring guides. However, Calkins released her *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum (K-2)* in 2003 that answered the call from some districts for a pre-packaged program. The units have since been re-released to include a separate set for each grade level (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013).

Advantages and disadvantages. Process writing garners both advocates and critics among teachers and researchers. Advantages to the method include the emphasis on planning, drafting, and revising, with instruction occurring through minilessons and student conferences. Teaching supports natural differentiation as students' work is assessed on an individual basis. Process writing can also be motivating due to the personal, collaborative nature of the learning environment. Conversely, those critical of the method often state that the instruction of skills in this type of instruction is not explicit enough, especially for struggling writers (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). Despite

criticism, a sizeable number of teachers use this approach alone or in combination with other methods to teach writing (Cutler & Graham, 2008).

In a meta-analysis of the process writing approach, Graham & Sandmel (2011) examined 29 experimental and quasi-experimental studies to determine if the method improves the quality of students' writing and the motivation to write. They found that students in regular education classrooms receiving process writing instruction became better writers. The results were statistically significant for moderate improvements in overall writing, although this was not the case for struggling writers, nor did it seem to enhance motivation for writing. Since the beginnings of process writing, the method evolved greatly, due in part to the efforts of the National Writing Project. More experimentation with a flexible approach to process writing combined with more traditional skills instruction may be warranted (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Cutler & Graham, 2008).

Teachers' perceptions of process writing. Simmerman, Harward, Pierce, Peterson, Morrison, Korth, Billen, and Shumway (2012) conducted a study of 112 teachers of grades K-6 to determine their perceptions of process writing. These researchers believed that after years of research about effective writing practices, "many teachers may not be fully implementing these practices, or they may be using them in ways that detract from their effectiveness" (p. 294). Therefore, they surveyed teachers to determine how they valued and used different aspects of writing instruction and how they perceived themselves as writers and teachers of writing.

The results showed that for every aspect of writing on the survey, teachers reported valuing writing instruction more than implementing it. The elements with the

highest scores were teaching in response to student needs, daily writing, student sharing, and writing as a process. The lowest scores appeared for commercial writing programs, dictation, worksheets, and genres based on technology. Teachers were also given the opportunity to write an open-ended response for each item. Although not many comments were recorded, by far the most common theme had to do with time constraints. The next most frequent response had to do with applicability of an aspect of writing (e.g., appropriateness at a certain grade level). Finally, some teachers commented on their own lack of ability or competence at teaching writing.

Teachers were also asked to rate themselves as teachers of writing on a scale from 1-10, with a score of one indicating a negative perception and ten being positive. The average score for the 112 teachers was 6.73. When asked to explain this rating, thirty percent of the teachers responded with a variety of declarations like “I love writing” or “I have always written.” Some said they found writing hard, they did not have time for writing, or it was limited to journals or blogs.

Respondents also answered two open-ended questions about what most influenced them as teachers of writing. The results showed the most powerful influence to be professional development from mentors like colleagues, literacy coaches, administrators, as well as college and high school instructors.

In addition, older or more experienced teachers generally reported focusing on writing conventions more than their younger counterparts. Teachers in the upper grades tended to focus on assessments and writing responses to literature while primary teachers often focused on handwriting. Intermediate teachers were more concerned with content rather than form. Primary teachers tended to use word walls and focus on word-level

comprehension. The researchers reported that, "...overall, teachers did not report using commercial writing programs or worksheets. It appears that they valued their instructional independence" (Simmerman et al., 2012, p. 301).

A review of the history of writing instruction helps explain the state of writing in classrooms across the United States. It also indicates possible future directions for schools, teachers, and students. The driving force may reside with the teachers responsible for planning and implementing daily instruction in the classroom. The next section will focus on a significant factor affecting writing instruction: the teacher.

The Teacher of Writing

Much of what happens in classrooms on a daily basis depends on the teachers themselves. Personal attitudes, the willingness to collaborate, participation in professional learning, and personal writing experiences can all affect how an educator approaches daily instruction.

Personal and Experiential Factors

How teachers approach writing instruction is influenced by many factors, both within and outside of a teacher. These personal experiences vary greatly from teacher to teacher and can have considerable impact, both positive and negative, on what writing looks like in the classroom.

Collaboration. A teacher's willingness to work with others toward improved practices can positively affect instruction. In a study of writing pedagogy within a professional learning community, Pella (2011) examined transformations in teachers' perspectives around writing as they collaboratively researched writing practices. The teachers reported changes in their thinking after planning lessons together, observing

others teach, and participating in discussions during debriefing meetings. The findings showed that this collaborative learning model resulted in an increase in teacher expectations for students, as well as an improved self-efficacy toward teaching writing.

Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, and Schwarcz (2010) found similar results in a study in which teachers examined student writing outcomes through the lens of a researcher. By looking at students' written assessments as a group, teachers identified areas of need in student learning and their own knowledge base. Teachers' confidence in pedagogical content knowledge also increased, which in turn positively affected student outcomes. This inquiry-based approach to learning fostered professional development and collaboration with colleagues.

Collaboration can produce positive effects, but when daily writing instruction is inconsistent, effective practices in action are difficult to observe. Grisham and Wolsey (2011) studied teacher candidates across a three-course sequence of literacy methods and determined that there are not always sufficiently strong model teachers of writing for student teachers. Little writing instruction occurred in the schools in which the students were placed. They also found that "a strong emphasis on teaching reading has relegated writing instruction to a less important status" (p. 348). If writing instruction is absent in schools, the effectiveness of observation and collaboration are weakened.

Teacher dispositions. How a teacher feels about a subject or discipline can affect the frequency and competence in which she engages in instruction. An educator's self-efficacy toward teaching can influence instruction as well. The study by Harward, Peterson, Korth, Wimmer, Wilcox, Morrison, Black, Simmerman, and Pierce (2014) delineated some of the feelings different teachers have about writing:

High implementers share their enjoyment and confidence in writing, allowing children also to enjoy self-expression and variety. Low implementers reflect their own insecurities with writing, focusing what instruction they do give on spelling, punctuation, and grammar, aspects that can be standardized, scored, and to some extent controlled. (p. 217)

These feelings, whether positive or negative, can stem from personal experiences related to writing, professional learning, and/or the school environment. Knowing one's own history with writing and writing instruction enables teachers to reflect on instructional practices (Hawkins & Razali, 2012).

Self-efficacy. Teachers' feelings of self-efficacy toward teaching writing can affect instruction in several ways. Determining what causes them to have negative feelings could reveal options for removing roadblocks to improving instruction. Al-Bataineh, Holmes, Jerich, and Williams (2010) conducted a study to examine the factors that affect the self-efficacy of elementary teachers while adopting a new writing curriculum. Their results identified eight themes divided into categories of negative and positive effects. The factors favorably affecting writing instruction included the influence of a mentor teacher, collaboration, positive teacher attitudes, and successful personal writing experiences. Teachers with high self-efficacy demonstrated a belief in the importance of writing for future success in school and beyond. The four factors that negatively impacted self-efficacy included unfavorable personal writing experiences, a lack of training for teaching writing, inconsistent guidelines for writing, and pressures from the school environment. While these factors seem to be diametrically opposed, the researchers noted that self-efficacy tends to follow a continuum rather than a dichotomy,

and that some teachers were confident in certain areas of writing instruction and not in other areas.

Teacher-related effects on writing instruction have been corroborated by other researchers as well. Cremin (2006) examined the relationship between teachers as writers and their self-efficacy as writing teachers. Her findings showed that individuals' previous writing experiences, attitudes toward writing, and conceptions about creativity affected their self-efficacy toward teaching writing. Teachers in this study reported tensions and discomfort while writing, which reflected on their teaching practices and how their students felt while writing. Some of the discomfort caused teachers to experience writer's block or negative self-evaluations of their writing. The tension and anxiety reported by teachers in terms of writing instruction was a common theme in research on teacher self-efficacy (Fleischer, 2004; Gardner, 2014; Pella, 2011).

The negative feelings of teachers are also reflected onto their students, with several experts asserting that to teach writing, one must be a writer (Cremin, 2006; Gardner, 2014; Grainger, 2005; Roberts & Wibbens, 2010). This raises the question as to whether teachers will be effective instructors of writing if they do not feel comfortable writing themselves. Bifuh-Ambe (2013) comments on this issue stating:

Teachers must feel competent as writers and writing teachers in order to provide the kind of instruction and modeling that will help students develop into proficient writers. However, in a high-stakes learning environment, teachers often feel that they neither have the ability nor the time to provide quality writing instruction. (p. 137)

While Bifuh-Ambe acknowledges outside factors affecting instruction, a teacher's attitude is something within his or her control. Teachers' feelings of confidence and competence as writers seem to have importance in order for them to develop effective students of writing. In addition, the regular practice of teacher writing (or not) can also impact their abilities at writing instruction.

Beliefs of high and low implementers. The idea that teachers can be classified as either "high implementers" or "low implementers" of writing instruction comes from an examination of beliefs about writing instruction and how teachers engage in various writing practices. A study by Harward, Peterson, Korth, Wimmer, Wilcox, Morrison, Black, Simmerman, and Pierce (2014) explored why primary teachers do or do not engage in writing instruction on a regular basis. These researchers determined the beliefs and practices of high, transitional, and low implementer teachers of writing instruction.

The participants were chosen from two previous studies of 177 teachers. These educators were identified as high, transitional, or low implementers of writing through surveys and classroom observations. The high implementers reported on surveys that they valued process writing, Writer's Workshop, and Six Traits writing assessment. They used needs-based instruction and integrated writing across content areas. High implementers also reported modeling writing, collaborating with students, and providing time for independent writing. Teachers identified as transitional also valued process writing and the Six Traits assessment, but did not implement either with regularity. They also did not generally teach writing in the content areas and tended to teach more whole class lessons rather than small group or individualized instruction. These teachers seldom modeled writing but allowed for journal and independent writing. Process writing was rarely

observed in these classrooms. Low implementers of writing instruction did not report using process writing at all, or much of any writing during the literacy block or content areas. They did not model writing, collaborate with students, or provide opportunities for independent writing. Whole group lessons were used to introduce writing skills without a connection to authentic texts.

From that larger group of 177 teachers, Harward et al. (2014) chose 14 teachers from eight suburban and rural school districts to represent various grade levels, socioeconomic statuses, and ethnicities, as well as a mix of implementation levels. The researchers also sought to differentiate results based on teacher age, level of education, and years of experience. The data from this qualitative study consisted of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews that resulted in three distinct findings: hindrances and helps, teacher beliefs and practices, and teacher preparation and professional development related to writing instruction.

Clear dichotomies existed between high and low implementers in all three areas. The main hindrances identified by all teachers in the study were insufficient time for instruction, the various levels of students in the classroom needing individualized assistance, and tensions between teaching content and conventions. The differences came in how the teachers approached the challenges. High implementers valued writing and sought help to solve their frustrations, while low implementers lacked the motivation to find the time to make writing a priority. High implementers reported having positive mentors who provided needed supports such as literacy specialists, university professors, colleagues, and authors of professional texts. The low implementers, on the other hand, indicated that they lacked support and received no mentoring for teaching writing.

The beliefs and practices of high and low implementers were also strikingly different. High implementers felt that teaching the writing process was an essential part of everyday, perceived themselves as good writers, and shared their own writing and writing processes with students. These teachers regularly integrated reading and writing, as well as writing across content areas. High implementers “saw the entire school day as filled with opportunities to write” (p. 220). Conversely, low implementers, often held poor self-perceptions of themselves as writers. They reported valuing writing but only provided sporadic opportunities for students to do so. Their focus on test scores also caused them to emphasize spelling and punctuation over content in writing.

Finally, the teachers reported vast differences in teacher preparation and professional development. High implementers credited university coursework for their motivation for writing instruction. They also “participated in and appreciated district and school efforts to continue to help them progress as writing teachers” (p. 218). Low implementers reported weak preparation in writing instruction at their universities, as well as little or no support from their schools. These teachers felt that the professional development was “imposed” and even resented mandated meetings. The low implementers tended to blame their lack of writing instruction on factors beyond themselves, and the researchers noted that their lack of confidence was sometimes projected onto their students.

By exploring the reasons why teachers do or do not engage in writing instruction may “...help other educators understand positive instructional factors that may potentially make a difference in K-6 students’ writing and negative factors that can potentially be avoided” (p. 219).

Negative personal writing experiences. Research suggests that teachers may not engage in writing instruction as much as they should due to their own experiences with writing. Gardner (2014) studied 115 student teachers to determine their self-perceptions and confidence as writers as they explicitly engaged in self-reflection about the writing process. He found that over two-thirds of the students reported having a less than positive attitude toward writing, and noted that if this attitude is proportionally representative of all elementary teachers, the state of writing instruction will continue to be problematic. The participants' questionnaires and writing journal entries also indicated an awareness of the connection between a teacher's enthusiasm for a subject and subsequent student learning. This study also pointed to the need for teachers to overcome their own anxieties about writing in order to become effective teachers of writing.

The sting of the red pen. How teachers approach writing instruction is also influenced by how they learned to write in school. Cathy Fleischer (2004) explained this as follows;

I had always believed that you were innately either a good or a bad writer and that teachers could only help you become a 'correct' writer. I came to the writing instruction course with years of experience in red-penciled essays that noted my incorrect use of *who* and *whom*; in comment-free papers handed back with a seemingly random A, B, or C emblazoned across the top. (p. 24)

Fleischer's comment relates the mystery often surrounding writing instruction; students write, teachers correct errors, and then assign an ambiguous grade. With no better experiences or professional learning, teachers naturally revert to what they know.

In a study of pre-service teachers, Street (2003) found that their identities as writers were influenced profoundly by their own instruction as writing students. He noted that “all participants had critical teachers whom they deemed detrimental to their development as writers. These critical teachers all shared a common emphasis on prescriptive correctness over meaning and experiences” (p. 42), and one teacher remembered the “sting of the red pen” from her writing instructors. Gardner (2014) reported that forty-six percent of the participants had past negative writing experiences and a dislike for writing in school. “The nature of the writing pedagogy adopted by schools which some students described as a ‘chore’, ‘functional’, ‘prescriptive’ and tightly structured with ‘secretarial skills privileged over content’” (p. 141) was deemed the major cause for these negative feelings. These results highlight the fact that the methods used to teach the participants did little to promote a positive attitude toward writing and writing instruction.

Theoretical orientations toward writing. Teachers’ beliefs about instruction are also directly tied to classroom practices and exert a powerful influence over instruction and student outcomes (Graham et al., 2002). If a teacher has a particular belief about how writing is best learned, it would follow that she would teach in a way that aligns with this viewpoint. By studying such beliefs, we may be able to predict the kinds of practices teachers commonly employ when teaching writing.

These assumptions about beliefs and corresponding instructional practices led Graham et al. (2002) to study teachers’ orientations to teaching writing involving traditional instruction emphasizing correctness and explicit teaching of skills versus instruction placing a greater emphasis on incidental and informal learning. These

researchers predicted that by comparing beliefs to practices, teachers would reveal a balance between the two orientations in their instruction of writing. They examined two basic orientations to teaching writing through a questionnaire completed by 112 first through third grade teachers, namely, the natural learning approach and a skills-based orientation.

Participant responses fell into three distinct categories: Correct writing, explicit instruction, and natural learning. The factors related to correct writing included the copying of models, spelling, grammar, correct English, and writing in one draft. Explicit instruction practices included word study for correct spelling, explicit instruction of writing skills, handwriting practice, and the teaching of planning and revising. The natural learning methods were grammar instruction used only when the need arises, students critiquing one another's writing, the importance of process over product, and students learning writing conventions by writing. The results showed that teachers' beliefs about writing were significantly related to their instructional practices. For example, educators who believed in the importance of correctness frequently emphasized grammar, handwriting, and spelling instruction but not the use of invented spelling. Consequently, teachers holding beliefs related to the natural approach to learning frequently focused on writing conferences and mini-lessons, students sharing writing, students helping peers, and the use of invented spelling. The researchers reported that,

...we believe that teachers' theoretical orientations are important to understanding effective writing instruction. The findings from this study provide support for this contention by showing that teachers' beliefs or

theories about writing instruction are related to their reported teaching practices” (p. 163).

Beliefs about instruction. Beliefs about writing instruction will also significantly affect teaching practices. The previous study looked at two diverse orientations to writing instruction, natural and skills-based. Graham et al. (2002) also examined the importance of each of the factors for correctness, explicit instruction, and natural learning, predicting that teachers actually emphasize both orientations. Their results showed that ninety-nine percent of teachers responded that explicit instruction is important in the teaching of writing. At the same time, seventy-three percent felt that natural learning is important. Only thirty-nine percent of teachers believed in the importance of teaching correctness to primary grade children. These results give credence to the researchers’ prediction that teachers value both natural learning and explicit writing instruction.

Factors affecting orientations. McCarthy & Mkhize (2013) investigated teachers’ orientations towards writing instruction and the influences on their beliefs. These contextual factors fell into three categories: school demographics, materials, and assessments. In this study, twenty-nine teachers in four different states were interviewed about their instructional practices with findings revealing that the demographic make-up of student populations affected how teachers approached writing.

In high-income schools, instruction aligned with a more natural learning orientation where style, voice, and reading-writing connections were emphasized. In low-income schools, though, teachers focused on grammar, mechanics, and sentence construction that aligned more closely with a “correctness” orientation to teaching writing. Teachers also stated increasing numbers of English language learners as

affecting writing instruction, with some reporting having lower expectations for these students and uncertainty about how to best address their needs.

School demographics were also connected to the materials and programs used in writing instruction. The data showed that teachers in low-income schools focusing on a skills orientation often used scripted programs, while teachers in high-income schools reported more freedom and choice in the materials used for writing instruction. These teachers tended to value the quality of student writing over the grammar and mechanics. The researchers stated that “this raises a concern that students in low-income schools are missing out on an authentic, challenging writing curriculum, similar to a reading curriculum that is high quality and engaging” (p.28).

Finally, the study showed the effect that writing assessments might have on teachers’ orientations. Participants reported that rubrics and state writing assessments affect how they view writing and writing instruction. For example, they are using rubrics more frequently to judge students’ writing. They also reported aligning their instruction to state writing assessments until after the completion of these test when they moved to more “authentic” writing lessons.

Personal experiences that affect teachers’ orientations toward instruction present significant influences on writing in the classroom. The next powerful influence is that of professional learning experiences before and after educators enter the classroom.

Professional Preparation and Development

The inadequacy and inconsistency of writing instruction in schools indicates the need for focused professional development. Roberts and Wibbens (2010) make the case that students in the primary grades need high-quality instruction to help reverse the

current predicament of low writing achievement, calling for high-quality professional development that emphasizes developmentally appropriate writing practices and learning environments. Roberts and Wibbens' definition of quality professional development is similar to that of quality instruction in that it must be individualized to meet teachers' needs, provide iterative, on-going support, and be designed to support independence.

Professional learning. Just providing learning opportunities is not enough to guarantee improved instructional practices; the quality of the learning must be considered as well. There are many formats for professional learning available to teachers such as online education programs, university coursework, workshops, professional organization conferences, study groups, etc. Professional development can be compulsory or voluntary, and the social structures can vary from independent learning at home to lecture formats and collaborative learning. All of these factors affect how well learning is internalized and sustained in daily teaching.

In reference to general professional learning, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) state that "effective professional development involves teachers both as learners and as teachers and allows them to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role" (p. 82). They list several key characteristics that help ensure learners' success. First, learning must be participant-driven with reflection and inquiry around the practices being studied. Teachers must have a say in how their work connects to students' work. Next, the learning should be designed to encourage a collaborative sharing of knowledge within a community of learners that can consist of both instructors and teachers working together to improve skills in teaching and writing. Finally, Darling-Hammond and

McLaughlin (2011) emphasize the importance of professional development being “sustained, ongoing, and intensive” (p. 82).

Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2011) researched the qualities of effective professional development as well and reported similar characteristics including important structural aspects of teacher learning situations. They note that the format (coursework, workshop, study group), the collective participation of a group of teachers from the same school, grade, or content area, and the length of the activity are all key factors affecting the sustainability of the learning.

Disparity between Reading and Writing Coursework. Another factor to consider here is the balance between reading and writing preparation. New teachers entering the classroom bring with them personal experiences related to writing from the ways they were taught to write in elementary and secondary schools. They also apply their learning about reading and writing pedagogy from university coursework. Yet there exists a wide variation in how teachers are prepared to teach the two disciplines. In their book titled, *Because writing matters: Improving student writing in our schools*, National Writing Project and Carl Nagin (2006) stressed the need for more professional development in writing, indicating that, “elementary school teacher training focuses on reading methods, and only a handful of states require a course in writing pedagogy for certification” (p. 16), and that “in terms of coursework and competency requirements, the disparity between those for reading and those for writing is striking” (p. 59-60). Such claims emphasize the need to examine teacher preparation and continued professional development for writing instruction.

Competing value systems of teacher preparation. The question of how educators come to know about teaching writing can be examined by looking at the history of writing and writing teachers. Roen, Goggin, & Clary-Lemon (2008) studied the evolution of rhetoric and writing teachers from early history until the present day. They found a disparity between the preparation that college teachers of writing receive as compared to teachers of English in elementary and secondary schools. They suggested that,

There are no quick answers that encompass the wide range of pedagogical action that constitutes being a writing teacher today in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education – but suggest instead that our preparation as teachers is filtered through a long and complex series of events, of political and social constraints, of competing value systems. (p. 360)

Their historical review of the teaching of writing suggests that many factors compete for attention with coursework in writing instruction. This includes how teachers prepare for entering classrooms after completing degrees in education.

In a study of teacher candidates, Grisham & Wolsey (2011) examined the learning of writing pedagogy that occurred across literacy methods classes and student teaching. They based their work on the fact that little had been written in the professional literature about the writing component of teacher education, and that the emphasis in teaching reading caused writing instruction to assume a less important status. Their results showed how marginalized writing instruction was compared to reading instruction. Teacher candidates in this study faced a variety of challenges when it came to learning about writing instruction. One recurring factor was that of time, as the researchers reported,

“the paucity of time allotted to writing in K-6 classrooms became painfully obvious” and was insufficient to prepare new teachers to assume responsibilities for teaching writing. Instruction was also affected by district restrictions--although candidates learned certain methods in class, they were not always able to use them.

Grisham & Wolsey concluded that several variables prevented teacher candidates from observing good models of writing instruction including state mandated assessments, traditional instructional approaches, and rigid district curriculum mandates. Based on their findings, they indicated the following:

Direct instruction in the pedagogy of writing is essential. One or two class sessions about writing instruction with teacher candidates will not prepare them adequately to teach writing in K-6 classrooms. The case study described here illustrates the difficulty of preparing teacher candidates for assuming instructional responsibility with so many variables to consider. (p. 360)

This research indicated a need for stronger preparation for preservice teachers in writing pedagogy, which may be more easily said than done.

Lack of writing coursework offered. The amount and kind of university coursework offered to teacher candidates may be an issue to consider. In a study of elementary teachers in grades 4-6, Gilbert and Graham (2010) found that sixty-five teachers reported receiving minimal or no preparation to teach writing in their college certification program. The researchers urged that teacher education programs must do a better job at preparing teachers to teach writing.

National Writing Project and Carl Nagin (2006) wrote about the need for increased professional development in writing. They reported that few states require

specific coursework on writing for teacher certification, although most test potential teachers on their basic writing skills. Smagorinsky (2010) called for teacher education programs to provide explicit courses in writing pedagogy to help teachers contend with the many forces influencing classroom instruction. If teacher expertise is important for student success, it seems as though more consistent requirements for teacher training in writing are necessary.

High quality professional development. Specific to teacher education around writing, Bifuh-Ambe's (2013) work showed some positive results for teachers after ten weeks of research-based professional development. Before data collection, the researchers met with district literacy specialists from four elementary schools to investigate current writing practices and determine a focus for the professional development. The study then examined teachers' attitudes toward writing, self-perceptions as writing teachers, and how students' attitudes toward writing instruction and perceptions changed over the course of the training. She found that when teachers' learning outcomes were embedded within training, student outcomes improved. She also observed the need for addressing teachers' specific needs instead of providing generic support for writing instruction. Bifuh-Ambe established that teachers need time for reflection on their practices and a supportive environment in which to work collaboratively toward determining successful student outcomes. This study aligns what is known about student learning with adult learning in that effectiveness requires differentiation and ongoing support. Teachers know what their students need and how they learn best and should accept nothing less for themselves in terms of their own learning.

In another study of teacher professional development, Pella (2011) looked at transformations in four teachers' pedagogy and perspectives toward teaching writing as they worked within a collaborative inquiry group. Over the course of one school year, the teachers met monthly, corresponded by email, co-planned lessons, and observed one another teach, debrief, and analyze the lessons. Across the year, the teachers struggled through theoretical tensions of teaching writing while their different experiences came together as a whole. As a result of their work together, the teachers experienced changes in pedagogies and perceptions about writing. Specific features of this learning model such as collaborative planning, observing others teach, and participating in debriefing meetings caused the teachers to increase their self-efficacy in teaching writing.

Tenets of the National Writing Project. One of the most influential providers of professional development in writing has been the National Writing Project (NWP). Founded in 1974 by James Gray at the University of California, Berkeley, the network has grown to nearly 200 university sites in all 50 states (Whitney, 2008; Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). Described as a teachers-teaching-teachers approach to learning, the project is known for its summer institutes, open institutes and coursework, and in-service work in schools. As of 2013, the NWP has worked with 70,000 teacher leaders and approximately 1.2 million teachers through its range of professional development services (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). When teachers participate in the NWP institutes they write together, share their writing with other teachers, and share successful classroom writing practices. The NWP can be described as a network of teachers reforming their writing practices by starting with themselves as writers. The teachers who attend the professional development become advocates for teaching writing in their

schools and districts. In addition, the NWP helps teachers examine writing pedagogy by developing a professional writing community that shares a passion and commitment for teaching writing, providing customized in-service and continuing education and research opportunities (Kaplan, 2008).

While research on the model and its effects on teacher practices has been comparatively small, Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) describe the impact as follows:

There is no doubt that the NWP has been a major force in accentuating the role of writing in learning, in reinvigorating teacher enthusiasm, in garnering respect for what teachers of writing accomplish in their classrooms, and in professionalizing the teacher as leader, teacher consultant, and researcher. (p. 283)

They point out the challenges in conducting empirical research on the practices of participating teachers because the training they receive from the NWP evolves and grows according to the needs of participants and changes in education. At the conception of the NWP, prewriting was a new concept. Later issues like sentence combining, revision strategies, rubrics, portfolios, writing in response to reading, and writing across the curriculum all garnered attention in schools and therefore, needed addressing. Changes such as these caused the project to modify directions and learning for teaching around writing instruction (Pritchard and Honeycutt, 2006).

A few more recent studies on NWP professional development indicate the changes that some teachers experience. For example, Whitney (2008) studied seven teachers who attended one summer institute to see what resulting changes they experienced. She conducted interviews before and after the institute, collected writing

samples, and corresponded with the participants one year after the training concluded. Whitney also participated in the institute herself, recording observations and collecting all documents distributed to the participants. Her results showed that as teachers participated in the writing process, they developed personally as writers and professionally as teachers of writing. The study described how teachers experienced the tensions and difficulties that accompany writing while simultaneously gaining confidence and competence. Teachers also increased their abilities to argue for, and defend their own professional judgments. The transformations described by participants show a connection between an effective, sustained professional development experience and collaborative professional communities.

One of the key tenets of the NWP is that teachers participate in the writing process themselves. The premise is that one must be a writer in order to write. Gallagher (2011) makes a similar analogy comparing teaching writing to coaching basketball. He says that if you want a child to put backspin on a ball, you don't tell them to do it. You have them stand next to you and follow your lead as you demonstrate how to do it. The same goes for writing instruction. Teachers must have their students "stand next to them" as they model how to write. To do that effectively, teachers must practice their craft by being writers. These sentiments also concur with previous research by Cremin (2006), Gardner (2014), Grainger (2005), and Roberts & Wibbens (2010).

Whitney and Friedrich (2013) analyzed data within a larger study of the NWP to determine the influence the project had on participants' teaching. Through in-depth interviews, the researchers found three main themes. First, teachers reported that they moved away from a focus on form toward valuing the content in student writing. Thus,

they revised the purpose for teaching writing to one of student learning and idea development. Secondly, the teachers started doing more teaching of writing by using the writing process to help scaffold student' learning about writing, rather than simply making assignments. Finally, the study showed that teachers began to further develop an ability to connect their own writing to their teaching of writing.

The impact of NWP on the professional learning of teachers may be due in part to its delivery model as the project follows many of the tenets of effective professional development (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Its summer institutes are intensive and require self-reflection on writing and writing practices. Teachers work collaboratively as they share information within a community of learners around a topic of their choosing. Participants must apply to attend the training, which speaks to their passion for teaching writing and their commitment to sustained learning. The structure of the delivery model is unique in its nature to sustain learning opportunities across a school year and beyond unlike typical one-day workshops or after school sessions.

External Influences Impacting Instruction

Many factors affect teachers as they approach writing instruction, some of which are within their control, while other external influences on instruction are not. The next section examines some environmental factors affecting writing in the classroom.

Pressure from the School Environment

Grisham and Wolsey (2011) observed several factors which impact instruction including high-stakes assessments, rigid curriculum and pacing guides, and persistent traditional approaches to instruction. Their study showed that when teacher candidates wanted to implement research-based writing lessons, they were often prevented from so

doing because the lessons did not match the district writing curriculum map. Cremin (2006) also indicated that pressures from prescription and accountability have fostered more conformity and compliance in writing instruction, as opposed to creativity and imagination. Even when teachers want to make positive changes in writing instruction, the pressures can be inhibitive. Pella's (2011) work with teachers showed that making changes different from those of colleagues can be challenging and pressures to conform tremendous even when working collaboratively in professional learning communities.

Time to fit it all in

A recurring theme in the research on writing has to do with the importance of time. The most common frustration cited by teachers in the study by Al-Bataineh et al. (2010) was insufficient time to teach all curricular requirements. These teachers felt the burden to cover content in tested subjects that often resulted in the exclusion of writing instruction from lesson plans. Smagorinsky (2010) also reported that due to pressures to increase student test scores, instruction across the school year was continually interrupted to prepare for standardized assessments. Thus, teachers not only have to learn how to teach writing but also how to fit it in the school day.

The following research contextualizes how time affects typical elementary classrooms. In a national study of primary grade writing instruction, Graham, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, and MacArthur (2003) reported considerable variability in the amount of time students spend composing. Results ranged anywhere from zero to 380 minutes per week. The National Writing Project and Nagin (2006) also assert that too little time is spent writing in and out of classrooms in the United States, citing reports from several national writing assessments to make his point that students need frequent and supportive

writing practice to improve learning. Yet time is always of the essence, as teachers must make decisions about what kinds of instructional supports are most important to include in the daily lessons. Additionally, when student assessments are tied to teacher evaluations, the way instructional time is allotted becomes an even more critical issue.

Pressure of Assessment

Standardized tests have also influenced all areas of the U.S. educational system, and writing is no exception. Due to the difficulties of creating reliable writing assessments, large variabilities in criteria have been the norm. This is because individual state requirements have used different rubrics with disparate requirements, some of which changed on a yearly basis (Hillocks, 2002). The types of assessments changed as well, with some requiring different genres of writing such as narrative, expository, or persuasive, and others necessitating writing in response to literature or content areas. It can be argued that such variations in measurement, whether high- or low-stakes assessments, have resulted in standardized tests being the “most obvious force shaping writing instruction in the United States” (Smagorinsky, 2010, p. 276).

Disconnect between assessment and instruction. One of the most significant problems with writing assessments resides in the disconnection between what is taught and what is assessed (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). In a study of large-scale writing assessments, Behizadeh (2014) analyzed the connections between writing theory, assessment, and instruction within the context of sociocultural theory. She found that many direct writing assessments consist of timed essays completed without assistance, contrary to best practices in writing instruction. Assessing student work in this manner “ignores both the social process of writing and different cultural ways of writing and does

not align with current theories of writing” (p. 128). Behizadeh also points out the dangers of using a “single story” to represent the learning of an individual (p. 126), one of which is the alignment of instruction to match this kind of assessment. “What is untenable is to continue the cycle of inauthentic, standardized tests driving instruction, and then allow the resulting poor instruction to contribute to low test scores and detrimental labels for particular groups of students” (p. 133). By judging students’ writing progress based on a single written sample constructed under a timed condition, educators significantly narrow what can be learned about students, as well as the kind of instruction they need to become proficient writers. When tests become the driving force for instruction, the results on writing instruction will likely be detrimental.

Different state requirements. Across the country, there are many different forms of assessment that can present a variety of problems. Hillocks (2002) conducted an in-depth study of state assessments in Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, and Texas, finding that each required different forms of evaluation, or a combination of the following: on-demand writing to a prompt, portfolio collections, and response to reading, either within or outside of the testing context.

Three rhetorical stances. Hillocks examined assessment and teaching in terms of three prevalent rhetorics, namely, current traditional rhetoric (CTR), expressivist rhetoric, and epistemic rhetoric. Instruction can be categorized as a combination of any of these three to make up a rhetorical stance. Teaching that is most aligned to CTR assumes that truth is objective and lies outside the investigator. Students research, observe, analyze data, and report findings to discover the objective truth. In terms of writing, teachers following a CTR stance lecture on correct form with limited emphasis on content. The

assumption is that once students learn the required form for writing, they are able to write. Instruction within this rhetoric follows a very traditional pattern of lecture and recitation. In general, teachers following the CTR stance favor form over content.

The expressivist rhetoric stance stems from a constructivist view of education; expressivists interpret writing as a personal expression of one's voice. Teachers following this stance allow students to develop their ideas through the writing process and by sharing with others. Discussion is encouraged among students, as opposed to the dissemination format of CTR where the teacher is in control of the information. With this rhetorical stance, the teacher acts as a coach or facilitator of students' ideas that they create from their own experiences. The expressivist stance is exemplified by the writer's workshop method of teaching writing. Students develop their own ideas around a framework set by the teacher, and support is provided for the students by the teacher and peers as they expand upon their own understandings. The classroom environment is one in which talk is encouraged as teachers and students support one another in the writing process.

The epistemic stance also follows a constructivist instructional perspective, holding that ideas are debated through dialog among classmates, which results in various levels of probable truths rather than absolutes. In these situations, student talk is maximized as complex problems are discussed in preparation for writing. Learning is not limited to the thinking of individuals, but is dependent on the synthesis of ideas as a group.

Effects of rhetorical stances on assessment. Hillocks asserted that different stances for teaching writing result in varying qualities of student work. He cited his own

prior research that found the composition results from a CTR stance to be very weak, while those from an expressivist stance showed positive effects eight to nine times greater, and from an epistemic stance, twenty-two times greater (Hillocks as cited in Hillocks, 2002, p. 27). That being said, if state assessments encourage a CTR for teaching, student results will likely be lower than if teachers choose one of the other two rhetorical stances.

Hillocks' research also compared the writing assessment requirements in each of the five states to instruction occurring in classrooms. The most significant finding was that instruction in the different states tended to reflect the way students were assessed. In Illinois, Oregon, and Texas, states that only administered direct writing assessments, over eighty percent of the teachers followed a CTR stance for teaching writing. Instruction focused on the same standard forms of writing prevalent in U.S. curriculum for hundreds of years. Teachers taught the importance of the form of writing instead of strategies for developing ideas. The majority of Kentucky teachers (seventy-five percent) also followed CTR, but at a lower level than the other three states. Interestingly, Kentucky used both direct writing assessments and portfolio assessments to measure writing progress. The percentage of teachers in this state following expressivist or epistemic stances was much higher than the other four states. New York was the outlier in the group as only twenty-nine percent of the teachers reported following a CTR. Instead, most of their instruction in writing revolved around responses to literature that was reflective of the content measured on that state's test. Clearly, these results show that assessment drives how writing is taught and what students learn.

Another interesting finding from this study is specific to writing instruction in Illinois. Hillocks pointed out the predictability of writing produced by students in this state as a result of the state assessment. In 1994, the writers of the assessment first determined that only three distinct genres of writing existed--narrative, expository, and persuasive. This, of course, excludes other forms of writing such as poetry or drama. Second, benchmark papers and scoring rubrics promoted a five-paragraph essay format for all three genres of writing. Because exemplary papers included an introductory paragraph outlining what was to come in the essay, teachers designed instruction so students would create such work. Even though narrative writing does not generally follow the same format in every case, teachers taught all genres in the same manner simply because the state exemplars did so. Finally, due to limits in the amount of time for testing set by the state legislature, writing assessments were given a forty-minute window for completion. Knowing that students could only be expected to write a certain quality for such an on-demand piece of writing in that time frame, scoring requirements were such that expectations for writing were lowered. Teachers only required and expected a modest level of quality from students. As long as the students could produce the required format with supporting rationale, it did not need to be examined for consistency, evidence, or relevance. Hillocks maintained that the Illinois format for a five-paragraph essay "imposed not only a format but a way of thinking that eliminates the need for critical thought" (p. 136).

While there are many factors that impede writing instruction in the United States, the effects of assessment may well be the most significant. It could be argued that there have been some positive effects, such as an increase in writing instruction when states

require some form of writing assessment. Hillocks (2005) feels that there are three possibilities for improving writing in this country: a) providing better teacher training in preparatory coursework, b) providing more professional development for teachers already in the field, and/or c) changing how we assess writing. He felt like the third option holds the most promise.

Challenges for assessing writing. Most experts agree that one of the most challenging aspects concerning writing is assessment, and that it often drives instruction which can be problematic with state mandated tests. This is because assessment rubrics can be subjective and lack interrater reliability. Yet without some means of measurement, schools and teachers cannot determine if instruction has been effective.

Student performance and growth in writing are difficult to measure, for many reasons. Standards vary from place to place and state to state. Unless they have been carefully trained, individual evaluators may hold different expectations for student performance. Since single assessments are unlikely to be able to show the range of a student's abilities--and cannot conceivably measure growth, written for different audiences for different occasions. Writing assessment is a genuine challenge. (National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 21)

State assessments present a particular difficulty when it comes to measuring student performance in writing. While evaluators may be trained to provide the highest reliability possible, the tests often do not align with instructional practices. In regard to how achievement is measured, Applebee and Langer (2009) state,

It is certainly true that the assessment emphasis on on-demand writing is out of alignment with curriculum and instruction that emphasizes an extended process of writing and revision, taps only a subset of the academic skills and knowledge students need, and leaves no room for the technological tools that students increasingly use both in and outside of school. (p. 26)

This method of assessment causes what Behizadeh (2014) calls “a single story” as related to student writing achievement. She stated that a timed essay is less likely to represent a pedagogy that values different ways of writing and different forms of student knowledge. She claims that this method of assessment “has negative effects on instruction and negative effects on students” (p. 126). High-stakes assessments can cause instruction focused on rubrics and the production of hollow essays filled with irrelevant content (Smagorinsky, 2010).

Effects of formative assessment on instruction. Single measures of writing achievement cannot possibly show students’ full development as writers. Districts and schools should develop local assessments able to diagnosis and evaluate overall abilities in writing (NWP & Nagin, 2006). Formative assessments may hold the best value for improving instruction and student writing outcomes.

In a meta-analysis of formative writing assessments, Graham, Hebert, and Harris (2015) found support for improving student outcomes with such assessments. Classroom-based assessments that provided students with direct feedback about their writing produced the largest positive gains in their writing. All four types of feedback measured (feedback from adults, peers, self-feedback, and computer feedback) produced gains in

students' writing. The largest effects came from adult feedback that took a variety of forms including teacher feedback on writing, feedback from parents and other adults, and teachers updating students on their writing progress. These results when compared to the effects of high-stakes, standardized assessments of writing hold promise for improving writing instruction and student achievement in writing.

Summary

In 2003, the National Commission on Writing made a call for a “writing revolution” in classrooms across the United States. An argument could be made that the country is still waiting for this to happen. For changes to occur, all stakeholders including universities, school districts, administrators, and most importantly teachers must be at the table. Teaching writing is not easy and has historically faced many roadblocks. One of the most important may be the development of exemplary writing teachers. Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) write that, “In too many schools, kids need to luck out to get a teacher who teaches writing” (p. 11). Unfortunately, this statement rings true for too many students in the United States.

This research seeks to continue work such as that of Harward et al. (2014) by examining the personal and professional experiences of primary teachers that affect classroom writing instruction. Chapter three will outline the methodology of this study, including both quantitative and qualitative data, which seeks to explore teachers' paths, passions, and practices as related to writing instruction.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study is to identify the personal and professional experiences of early elementary writing teachers (K-2) in an effort to match these experiences to common instructional practices. The state of writing instruction in classrooms across our nation could be improved by increasing the number of teachers who consistently provide best practices in writing instruction for their students (Harward, Peterson, Korth, Wimmer, Wilcox, Morrison, Black, Simmerman, & Pierce, 2014; National Commission on Writing, 2003; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; Roberts & Wibbens, 2010). This research sought to study writing teachers to identify common experiences and practices for replication in teacher professional learning experiences.

Research Design

This mixed-methods research design included both quantitative and qualitative data collected first from surveys and then followed by two focus groups interviews. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state that, "...the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (p. 5). The need to use both kinds of methods stems from the insufficiency of data from one or the other to explain the results. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain mixed methods research as follows:

Qualitative research and quantitative research provide different pictures, or perspectives, and each has its limitations. When researchers study a few individuals qualitatively, the ability to generalize the results to many is lost. When

researchers quantitatively examine many individuals, the understanding of any one individual is diminished. Hence, the limitations of one method can be offset by the strengths of the other method, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative data provide a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach by itself. (p. 8)

By using a mixed methods design, the quantitative piece allowed for objective, more generalizable data while the qualitative piece added voice and a deeper understanding to the data. In this study, the results from one offers the ability to offset the limitations of the other.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

4. What are the personal and professional experiences of early elementary (K – 2) teachers related to writing?
5. What do these teachers say they value about writing instruction in their classrooms and why?
6. Is there a relationship between these teachers' writing experiences and their classroom practices in writing?

Mixed Methods Research

This research followed an explanatory sequential design, characterized by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as one of the most straightforward mixed methods designs. The purpose of this specific framework was to use qualitative data to explain initial results obtained from quantitative data. The research occurred in two distinct

phases, with quantitative data from surveys collected first, followed by qualitative data collected from focus group interviews with seven of the survey respondents.

According to Ravid (2011), descriptive research can be defined as the study of phenomena as they occur naturally without intervention or manipulation of variables. In the design for this study, the qualitative results provided a more in-depth explanation of the quantitative findings, with data collected according to the following steps:

1. Collection and analysis of survey data
2. Application of the survey data to guide the qualitative strand
3. Interpretation of the data from both sets in which the qualitative results helped to more fully explain the quantitative results

Context of the study: General setting and sampling. The current study was set in a large urban school district in a Midwestern state with twenty-eight elementary schools. In 2014-2015, the district-wide student demographics were described as follows: 32.1% white, 30.4% black, 26.6% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, 6.6% two or more races, and 0.1% Pacific Islander.

Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight elementary schools in this district have traditional kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms whose teachers were surveyed to obtain the quantitative data during the first phase of the study (see Appendix A). It should be noted that this sampling included teachers of classes in two schools housing the immersion language and gifted programs. In addition, only the district's Montessori school was excluded from this sampling because, unlike the other schools in the district, this particular site provides combined preschool and kindergarten classes, as well as multilevel first through third grade classes. In sum, 214 Kindergarten, first, and

second grade teachers from the twenty-seven schools were surveyed regarding personal and professional experiences related to writing instruction.

Curricular context. All elementary schools in the focus district recently received the materials to teach writing using a Writer's Workshop approach between 2013 and 2016. The curricular program titled, *Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013) was purchased by several schools in the district in 2013. The remaining schools received the materials at various points between 2014 and 2016. Since 2013, several schools and their teachers focused professional learning on implementing the practices associated with process writing employed by this curriculum. At the time of the study, the implementation and influences of these curricular materials are inconsistent across the elementary schools throughout the district. In my role as a literacy coach in the district, I have noted the inconsistencies, as they have become a major point of discussion during many literacy coach meetings.

Role of the researcher. As a literacy leader for nine years in this district, I have significant experience surrounding writing instruction, primarily with teachers in one school. I also provided some training for the implementation of the *Units of Study* program to other schools in the district. My role as the moderator of the focus groups was to provide low levels of moderation and control over the discussion if group members were talkative and kept the discussion on track. In terms of focus group membership, I intended to include only those teachers with whom I had not worked with as a literacy coach. Due to scheduling difficulties, though, the second focus group was composed of four teachers with whom I had personally worked during the past 10 years.

Data collection. Data collection and analysis occurred in two phases as noted above. The first phase included a quantitative survey to gather data about teachers' personal and professional experiences surrounding writing and to determine how these experiences affected their instructional practices. The data was first tabulated by the Survey Monkey program, which resulted in rankings of importance for all questions in each category. Next, the data were analyzed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software before moving to the qualitative phase of data collection. The results helped develop the guiding questions for the focus group interviews to gain insight related to the survey responses. The focus group members gave voice to some of the survey results and helped clarify findings from the survey, as well as allowing for personal explanations and stories. Table 3.1 delineates the data sets and corresponding educator participants.

Table 3.1		
<i>Mapping of Data Sets and Corresponding Participants</i>		
<u>Data sets</u>	<u>All K-2 teachers</u>	<u>A selection of K-2 teachers</u>
Survey	X	
Focus groups		X

Quantitative data collection. The initial stage of data collection included a survey of all kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers (n=214) in the focal school district which posed questions focusing on their personal and professional experiences related to writing instruction (see Appendix A). The survey was organized into six sections: general information (demographics), teacher experiences, instructional practices, features of writing instruction, types of student writing activities, student actions and miscellaneous comments related to writing instruction. Items 26-42 and 50-59 were adapted from the

Teaching Writing Scale developed for previous research (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graham, Harris, Fink, & MacArthur, 2003). Other items were constructed by the researcher in consultation with committee members. The survey explored each teacher's personal and professional experiences related to classroom writing practices. Further, it posed questions about these educators' related classroom practices. The survey was disseminated electronically through email, with an accompanying message that provides a short explanation of the study, its purpose, and explanations of anonymity (see Appendix A).

Hello,

My name is Amy Huftalin. I am a doctoral student currently conducting research for completion of a degree in Reading and Language from National Louis University. My dissertation research focuses on writing instruction in early primary grades, and seeks to identify educators' personal and professional experiences related to writing instructional practices. Thus, I am respectfully requesting the assistance of kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers in completing the electronic survey linked below. Please note that the results of this study will be completely anonymous, with no way to connect names to specific responses. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. There will be no associated risks or benefits to completing the survey as individual responses will not be shared with the school district or anyone else. (Note: If, after completing the survey you would be interested in participating further (e.g., an interview), you will be provided an option to

indicate your interest.) I hope that you will take the time to assist in this study and truly appreciate your efforts! Please complete the survey by/before March 22, 2017.

The survey was disseminated from my National Louis email account using the online tool, Survey Monkey, so that no one other than myself would have access to the data. The program kept track of respondents and allowed for follow-up emails to only those who had yet to complete the survey. One follow-up email was sent on April 3, 2017 reminding teachers to participate in the study by completing the survey.

The survey included Likert scale items, two open-ended questions, and prompts related to grade level, experience, and other demographic information. Teachers were first asked basic demographic information, and then to rate experiences that have affected their personal writing instruction such as professional learning experiences, including formal coursework, mentors, and curricular materials. Next, participants were asked to indicate instructional patterns of practice and frequency of usage, followed by ratings of the importance of specific student writing activities. Finally, teachers were asked to respond to Likert scale items about the frequency of student practices related to writing and to answer two open-ended questions about challenges associated with teaching writing. At the end of the survey, teachers were thanked for their time and asked if they would be willing to continue in the study by participating in a focus group interview (see Appendix A).

Qualitative data collection. After collection and analysis of the quantitative survey data, the qualitative phase of the research began. The purpose of conducting a focus group is to give participating teachers an opportunity to discuss their writing

practices based on a series of guiding questions created in response to the previously analyzed survey data set. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) describe this qualitative method as follows:

The fundamental characteristic of focus groups during data collection is that the group dynamic starts to create a story. The narrative produced by the group begins to take hold and guide the production of data. Accordingly, group interviews are extremely useful for identifying the language, definitions, and concepts that the research participants find meaningful as they navigate through their daily life experiences. (p. 166)

The findings from the survey presented patterns that helped guide and form the content of the group focus discussions. I used the initial findings to develop a list of guiding questions to facilitate the group discussions. The list of questions can be found in Appendix B. The teachers' responses during the focus group were used to verify and deepen the understandings about instructional practices identified in the first phase of the study. In addition, the focus group afforded teachers the opportunity to explain in more detail, personal and professional experiences that shaped these common instructional practices. During the focus group, I acted as a discussion moderator. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), participants who are deeply interested in the topic help to ensure maximum discussion so that the researcher need only provide low levels of moderation and control.

Of the 61 survey respondents, 17 teachers volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews. As previously noted, I intended to include only teachers that I had not personally worked with in the capacity as a literacy coach in the qualitative portion of the

research. From the list of 17, only five respondents fit into that category. I used a scheduling application to find a common meeting time for the five teachers and myself. Unfortunately, only three respondents could meet for the focus group at the same time. This focus group met on May 30, 2017 for 45 minutes in a classroom at a local university.

After discussion with my dissertation chair, it was decided that a second focus group be assembled from remaining volunteers from the survey in order to provide additional data for the qualitative phase. I reached out to the remaining teachers from the original list of volunteers to set a common date for a focus group discussion. By again using the scheduling application, a second focus group was formed consisting of four teachers. While my original intention was to include only teachers with whom I had not worked closely, my experience with each teacher in the second group ranged from two to nine years.

Ethical Considerations

Several factors were considered closely to ensure the confidentiality and protection of study participants. The first factor concerns my position as an employee of the school district where this study occurred. As such, I participated as an insider to many of the matters surrounding current instructional practices in classrooms across the district. For example, in 2013 I initially suggested that my school pilot the *Units of Study* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013) to teach Writer's Workshop. I worked as a literacy coach up until May of 2017 with the teachers in three district elementary schools to incorporate the workshop model for writing instruction, and provided inservice opportunities to other teachers in the district around the implementation of this curriculum. As part of the

community of district literacy coaches, I knew which schools have made writing a focus for professional learning.

Despite my position and role in the school district, the data collected were secured using the following predetermined measures.

1. The surveys employed during the quantitative portion of the research were disseminated using Survey Monkey software originating from my National Louis student email account.
2. The data collected were not seen or available to anyone else, other than my doctoral dissertation committee.
3. All data were housed in a locked cabinet in my home office.
4. The confidentiality of schools and teachers was protected by providing pseudonyms for the participating educators involved. These pseudonyms, chosen by the individual teachers, are only known to themselves and the researcher.
5. All participating teachers were made aware during the survey phase of the study that their names would be linked to their survey data.
6. All participating focus group teachers signed letters of informed consent insuring their anonymity (see Appendix C).
7. The district was only described demographically to further protect any individuals involved.
8. A district official acting as the IRRB chair reviewed and approved all methods in this research study.

Timeline

Table 3.2 shows the timeline and order of events for this research study.

Table 3.2			
<i>Timeline for Data Collection</i>			
<u>February 2016</u> IRRB approval	<u>March 2017</u> District approval	<u>April 2017</u> Initial survey analysis	<u>May-June 2017</u> Focus group(s)/in- depth interviews
	Surveys sent to teachers	Identification of teachers willing to participate in focus group(s)/in-depth interviews	

Data Analysis

Like data collection, data analysis occurred in distinct phases, a characteristic of an explanatory mixed method design (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). That is, once the surveys were collected, they were preliminarily analyzed to inform subsequent data collection, as well as provide contact information for focus group participants. Once the focus groups met, the researcher analyzed this data set for dominant patterns. Finally, the researcher looked across all data sets for patterns, themes, and implications regarding what primary teachers do and say about classroom practices surrounding writing instruction. The next section in this chapter further describes each stage of the research.

Survey data. During the first phase of data analysis, quantitative data were collected in the form of survey results. The Survey Monkey provided an initial tabulation of the data with the total number of responses and means for each question. For each section of the survey, I ranked the means of the individual items from highest to lowest.

Next, the results were converted to numeric data in a form useful for data analysis by assigning numeric values to each response, cleaning data entry errors from the database, and creating special variables for statistical analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark,

2011, p. 204). The raw data were entered on the computer program *Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS)*. Means and standard deviations for each Likert scale item were calculated. Trends and distributions of resulting data were used to guide the qualitative phase of data collection.

Further analysis of the survey data revealed relationships that existed between the many variables surrounding personal and professional experiences related to classroom writing practices. The *SPSS* software was used to establish correlations between items in each section of the survey. First, the items in the section, Teach Experiences Related to Writing Instruction, were correlated to those in the section titled, Writing Instruction. Next, correlations were run for the sections, Writing Instruction and Types of Student Writing Activities. Finally, the same analysis was done for the sections, Writing Instruction and Student Actions.

The last step of survey analysis involved examining and categorizing the answers from the open-ended questions.

Focus group data. Next, the data from focus group interviews were collected, coded, and analyzed. According to Saldana (2013), “coding is a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristic-the beginning of a pattern” (p. 9). This data coding may occur in several cycles as the researcher attempts to capture repetitive patterns and consistencies of instructional practices (Saldana, 2013). This phase of qualitative analysis sought to describe and explain aspects of teachers’ experiences related to writing instruction by giving a voice to individuals.

Hesse-Biber and Leavey (2011) state that “While individual accounts compose the transcript, there is also a group narrative that emerges, which is larger than the sum of its parts” (p. 187). Thus, the analysis and coding of this data focused on both the individual and group levels given the dynamic created by a group discussion. Participants responded to questions emerging from all data collected up to this point. Their responses were derived from personal experiences surrounding writing instruction but may also have been affected by other members of the group. The focus group discussion sought to clarify any unanswered questions from previous survey data collected as well as deepen the understanding of the data by giving voice to individuals.

Methods. The focus group discussions were audio tape-recorded with both my personal phone and iPad. The first focus group took place on May 30 and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The second session occurred on June 12 in which the discussion continued for nearly an hour. Analytic memos were written to document notes about the logistics of the meetings as well as the process of coding and recording of themes from the data. Saldana (2013) describes memo writing as follows:

Your private and personal written musings before, during, and about the entire enterprise is a question-raising, puzzle-piecing, connection-making, strategy-building, problem-solving, answer-generating, rising-above-the-data heuristic. (p. 41)

The focus group discussions were transcribed by the researcher immediately following the individual sessions. After a discussion with my dissertation chair, the decision was made to send a follow-up email to all focus group participants to see if they wished to add any further thoughts for the study (see Appendix D). The results garnered during this

phase were then coded and compared to the quantitative results to develop research findings and implications for practice.

Coding. The process of coding the qualitative data was completed with the program, *Qualitative Data Miner (QDA) Lite*. Downloaded free, this program provided a tool for coding, organizing, and analyzing the texts from both focus group discussions.

After transcribing the first interview, I practiced coding with the program. I was able to determine several categories and subcategories during this practice session. The program allowed me to highlight portions of the text and then assign a color-coded tag. I deleted this practice set of codes and recoded the first session before completing the second focus group interview. After transcribing the second discussion, I coded the text using categories from the first discussion. The second session presented me with ideas for new codes and ways to reorganize the complete set of codes. After coding the second discussion, I solidified my set of categories and recoded both transcripts

Analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data. After separate collection and analysis of the data occurred, a cumulative analysis of all findings sought to uncover implications in response to the research questions. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state that:

Data analysis in mixed methods research consists of analyzing separately the quantitative data using quantitative methods and the qualitative data using qualitative methods. It also involves analyzing both sets of information using techniques that “mix” the quantitative and qualitative data and results-the mixed methods analysis. (p. 203)

The analysis represented, interpreted, and validated the data and results by presenting how the qualitative results explained the quantitative results. After each stage of the data collection, preliminary results were analyzed and organized. The items on the survey for each section were ranked according to means. Then correlations were done to determine relationships between items in different sections of the survey. The qualitative responses were coded and then the codes were ranked according to the amount of discussion of each. The top ten subcategories for each focus group were then compared for common topics.

The next stage of analysis compared the quantitative and qualitative results in which I considered for data from each set to answer the research questions separately. Common themes used to examine question one, “What are the personal and professional experiences of early elementary (K-2) teachers related to writing?” fell into two distinct categories: professional learning and curriculum. For number two, “What do these teachers say they value about writing instruction in their classrooms and why?” I found several writing practices and student actions in the data to help answer this question. The last question, “Is there a relationship between teachers’ writing experiences and their classroom writing practice?”, though, was not easily answered by distinct categories.

Summary

This chapter described the mixed methods research design for a study of elementary writing teachers’ paths, passions, and practices. The quantitative data explored 61 teachers’ experiences, influential factors, and instructional practices, including the time devoted to writing. This survey data was analyzed in order to identify and summarize relationships between variables, which were used to guide the subsequent

focus group discussions with early elementary teachers. The collection and interpretation of both data sets sought to provide further understanding about influences on writing instruction in primary grades. The next chapter presents the research findings described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the findings of data collected in this mixed-methods research study. For each research question, first the quantitative data are reported followed by the qualitative data. Next, the two data sets are compared for similarities and differences. Finally, a summary is provided before the data for the next question are presented.

Description of the Survey and Sample

The data collection began with a survey titled, “Primary Grade Writing Instruction” which was emailed to all kindergarten, first and second grade teachers in the target school district. The survey consisted of five sections, namely, 1) Teacher Experiences Related to Writing Instruction, 2) Instructional Practices Used, 3) Writing Instruction, 4) Student Actions, and 5) Types of Student Writing Activities. It also contained demographic information prompts and two open-ended questions. Survey Monkey computed the weighted averages of the responses to each item and ranked them within the separate categories in the survey. The data were then analyzed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to find correlations and patterns of association between responses to the survey items.

Representativeness of the Sample

A total of 61 out of the 214 teachers (29%) surveyed responded after the initial email and a follow-up reminder sent seven days later. Although the response rate to the survey was 29%, this does not necessarily translate to lower study validity. Morton, Bandara, Robinson, and Carr (2012) sought to determine acceptable response rates for

studies conducted in the 21st century. They cited several recent studies that demonstrated that there is not a direct correlation between response rate and validity. They stated that “that some studies with low response rates, even as low as 20%, are able to yield more accurate results than studies with response rates of 60% to 70%” (p. 107).

Table 4.1 contains a demographic description of the respondents to the survey. Nearly three out of four respondents identified themselves as White / Caucasian. The vast majority of survey respondents (95%) were woman compared to only 5% men which lines up very closely to the district percentages of 93% women and 7% men. Almost three quarters of survey respondents ranged in age from 35-54 years. Both grade level taught and years of teaching were nearly evenly distributed. Survey respondents were not asked to define their level of education, although all the focus group members completed a Master’s degree, with one being Nationally Board Certified and two holding Reading Specialist Certificates.

The available district demographics are also listed in Table 4.1. For this study, only elementary teachers were included. The district reports race and ethnicity for all teachers K-12, totals which could be quite different for the group of elementary teachers participating in this study. The gender totals listed for all classroom teachers grades K-2 (7% men and 93% women) compared very closely to those who responded to the survey (5% and 95% respectively.) Teacher age and years of experience were also unavailable for the district as a whole but are reported for survey respondents. Finally, the district totals for teachers at each grade level were nearly equally distributed. For the survey, respondents for second grade totaled slightly lower at 25% compared to 36% and 39% for kindergarten and first grade teachers respectively.

Table 4.1				
<i>Demographics of Survey Respondents</i>				
<u>Demographic</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>	<u>District Percentage</u>
Race/Ethnicity	African	3	5%	
	American/Black			
	Hispanic/Latino	10	16%	
	White/Caucasian	47	77%	
	Biracial/Multiracial	1	2%	
Gender	Male	3	5%	7%
	Female	58	95%	93%
Age	25-34 years	10	16%	
	35-44 years	27	44%	
	45-54 years	15	25%	
	55-64 years	9	15%	
Grade level	Kindergarten	22	36%	32%
	First grade	24	39%	34%
	Second grade	15	25%	34%
Number of years teaching	0-5 years	15	25%	
	6-10 years	13	21%	
	11-15 years	13	21%	
	16+ years	20	33%	
Note: ^a n=61				

Preparation for Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses of the survey were completed by Survey Monkey before correlational analyses with SPSS. Next, two focus group interviews were conducted, and the participants' responses were transcribed. The transcripts from the two group interviews were coded using the software program, Qualitative Data Miner Lite (QDA Lite). These data were organized into broad categories and analyzed for frequencies of occurrences of topics, differences between the two focus groups, and relationships to

research questions. The codes were organized into five categories as well as several subcategories (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2		
<i>Coding Categories</i>		
<u>Category</u>	<u>Subcategory 1</u>	<u>Subcategory 2</u>
Professional learning	Workshop Working with peers Licensure Curricular/PD	
Student factors	Growth Independence Confidence Motivation/enjoyment	
Teacher factors	Management Confidence about instruction Feelings about instruction Adapting curriculum Goal setting Knowing students Change across time Writer's Workshop	Materials Students
Writing practice		Workshop model Conferencing Sharing Choice Content Drawing Details Small moments Genres Procedures Editing/revising Reading/writing connection Units of Study/Calkins Other programs
	Theory/programs	

Challenges	Shared writing	
	Journals	
	Word walls	
	Invented spelling	
	Assessment	
	Writing across the curriculum	
	Explicit instruction	
	Writing for testing	
	Foundational skills	
	Consistency	Training
		Curriculum
		Amount of writing instruction
		Benchmarks
		Kind of instruction
	Time	
	Management of students	
	Background knowledge	
	Differentiation	
	Expectations on teachers	
	Expectations of students	

The coding program produced a report that ranked each subcategory according to the number of the words associated with that particular code. Because the focus groups were two distinct discussions and the members from the second group were more familiar with each other as well as the researcher, I kept the data from the two transcripts separate. Finally, I made tables with the rankings of the categories for each focus group according to the amount of discussion that occurred around each topic (see Table 4.3).

The results of the survey for all respondents and those members of the focus groups were also compared for each section of the survey. First, the items in the survey section “Teacher experiences related to writing instruction” were ranked as shown in Table 4.4. The top six items, namely, *Peer collaboration*, *Workshops or professional*

Table 4.3		
<i>Ranking of Categories</i>		
	<u>Focus group 1</u>	<u>Focus group 2</u>
1	Managing students	Curriculum
2	Adapting curriculum	Units of Study/Calkins
3	Foundational skills	Expectations of students
4	Conferencing	Choice
5	Units of Study/Calkins	Conferencing
6	Working with peers	Kind of instruction
7	Reading/writing connection	Growth
8	Change across time	Shared writing
9	Writer's Workshop model	Assessment
10	Goal setting	Writer's Workshop model

conference sessions on writing, Working with a literacy coach or literacy specialist, Working with a colleague mentor, and Curricular materials, were common to both full survey respondents and focus group members.

Table 4.4				
<i>Survey Rankings for Teacher Experiences for All Respondents and Focus Group Members</i>				
<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Ranking of all respondents</u>		<u>Ranking of focus group members</u>	
	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Peer collaboration	1	(4.23)	1.5	(4.57)
Workshops or professional conference sessions on writing	2	(3.83)	1.5	(4.57)
Working with a literacy coach or literacy specialist	3	(3.63)	5.5	(3.86)
Working with a colleague mentor	4	(3.61)	5.5	(3.86)
Reading professional literature	5	(3.52)	3	(4.43)
Curricular materials	6	(3.44)	4	(4.14)

The survey section with items related to “Writing Instruction” resulted in five items commonly ranked for all respondents and the focus group members. The instructional practices *Teach capitalization and punctuation skills, Model writing,*

Explicitly model writing strategies, Teach spelling skills, and Provide opportunities for journal/free writing (with or without prompts) ranked consistently high for the focus group members and the overall survey results (see Table 4.5.)

Table 4.5				
<i>Survey Rankings for Writing Instruction for All Respondents and Focus Group Members</i>				
<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Full survey ranking</u>		<u>Focus group ranking</u>	
	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Teach capitalization and punctuation skills	1	(4.36)	2	(4.29)
Model writing	2	(4.32)	1	(4.86)
Explicitly model writing strategies	3	(4.03)	3	(4.14)
Teach spelling skills	4	(3.97)	5.5	(4.00)
Provide opportunities for journal/free writing (with or without prompts)	5	(3.95)	5.5	(4.00)

Next, the data is organized and used to answer each research question individually.

Research Question 1: What are the personal and professional experiences of early elementary (K-2) teachers related to writing?

Quantitative data: Survey. The first section of the survey explored teacher experiences related to writing instruction. To focus on meaningful correlations, only correlations equal to or stronger than $r = .40$ were reported. The weighted averages calculated on a scale of 1-5 resulted in the item ranking of importance in Table 4.6 below. Three of the top four responses, *Peer collaboration*, *Working with a literacy coach or literacy specialist*, and *Working with a colleague mentor* involved teachers collaborating with others while learning about writing. One other survey item related to collaboration, *Working with an administrator*, fell near the bottom of the list ranking 12 out of 13.

Generally, though, when considering writing, the participants in this study valued learning in association with others, particularly their colleagues.

Another trend that emerged from this section involved learning during university coursework. Survey respondents deemed these items as low in overall importance, at 9th,

Table 4.6		
<i>Weighted Averages of Teacher Experiences Related to Writing Instruction</i>		
<u>Item description</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Peer collaboration	4.23	0.76
Workshops or professional conference sessions on writing	3.83	1.00
Working with a literacy coach or literacy specialist	3.63	1.30
Working with a colleague mentor	3.61	1.22
Reading professional literature	3.52	0.92
Curricular materials	3.44	0.94
Personal writing experiences	3.41	1.09
Observations of writing instruction during in-service teaching	3.38	1.17
University/college teacher preparation clinical experiences (e.g., student teaching, cooperating teacher input, etc.)	3.10	1.31
Writing instruction in general university/college-level coursework	3.05	1.19
Writing instruction in high school	2.67	1.07
Working with an administrator	2.66	1.11
University/college teacher preparation courses focused on writing pedagogy (e.g., literacy methods, other methods courses, etc.)	2.59	1.13
Note: n = 61		

10th, and 13th place. When correlations analyses were calculated between the survey items in the sections, “Teacher experiences related to writing instruction” and “Writing instruction” only two resulted in moderate correlations. The item *Writing instruction in general university/college-level coursework* correlated with *Teach strategies for revising*

at $r = .400$, significant at the .01 level and with, *Teach strategies for editing* correlated at $r = .435$, also significant at the .01 level. No other survey items concerning teacher experiences and writing practices resulted in correlations in the moderate or higher range. When the responses to these Teacher Experience items were correlated with the responses to the survey items from the section on Writing Instruction, one item, *Reading professional literature*, showed statistically significant moderate relationships with five Writing Instruction items (see Table 4.7). *Reading professional literature* also ranked 5th out of 13 items on the list of teacher experiences. The correlation between *Reading professional literature* and the writing instruction item *Instruct using mentor texts* is the strongest correlation in the table. The other four correlations are moderate, but weaker, and deal with the Writers Workshop model.

Table 4.7	
<i>Significant Correlations between Reading Professional Literature and Writing Instruction</i>	
<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Correlation (2-tailed)</u>
Instruct using mentor texts	.612 ^a
Teach strategies for planning (e.g., brainstorming, organizing)	.420 ^a
Teach strategies for drafting	.446 ^a
Teach strategies for revising	.399 ^b
Teach strategies for editing	.509 ^a
Note: ^a Correlation significant at the 0.01 level, ^b Correlation significant at the 0.05 level, $n = 61$	

When the correlations were broken down by grade level, there were no appreciable differences. When the same items were disaggregated by the number of years of teaching, one trend of note occurred. Table 4.8 shows the significant correlations between *Reading professional literature* and the same five writing instructional practices,

divided according to the number of years of teaching experience. For teachers with up to 15 years of experience, *Reading professional literature* showed moderate to strong correlations for all five instructional strategies. The use of mentor texts for writing instruction as a result of professional reading showed the strongest correlation at .828. Interestingly, the group of teachers with greater than 16 years of experience showed a consistent lack of correlation between *Reading professional literature* and the listed instructional practices.

Table 4.8				
<i>Significant Correlations between Reading Professional Literature and Writing Instruction Based on Years of Teaching</i>				
Survey item	Correlation (2-tailed)	Correlation (2-tailed)	Correlation (2-tailed)	Correlation (2-tailed)
	0-5 years n=15	6-10 years n=13	11-15 years n=13	16+ years n=20
Instruct using mentor texts	.828 ^a	.777 ^a	.634 ^b	.191
Teach strategies for planning (e.g., brainstorming, organizing)	.608 ^b	.669 ^b	.502	.116
Teach strategies for drafting	.491	.750 ^a	.507	.141
Teach strategies for revising	.651 ^b	.576 ^b	.475	-.005
Teach strategies for editing	.629 ^b	.805 ^a	.596 ^b	.042
Note: ^a Correlation significant at the 0.01 level, ^b Correlation significant at the 0.05 level, n = 61				

Qualitative data: Focus group interviews. At the end of the survey, teachers were asked whether or not they would be interested in participating in a focus group to discuss personal experiences related to writing and writing instruction. Seventeen of the 61 respondents (28%) volunteered to participate further. Originally, my intention was to

include only those teachers that I had not personally worked with as a literacy coach, which left a total of five of the seventeen for the focus group. After attempting to schedule the meeting, though, only three of the five could participate. These three teachers, Focus Group 1, came together on May 30, 2017 to discuss writing for approximately 45 minutes.

At that time, I decided to contact other teachers from the original list of 17 to organize a second focus group. These teachers, Focus Group 2, all worked with me and each other at some point in the past 3 years. The participants were very comfortable and at ease discussing experiences and practices related to writing. Focus Group 2 was composed of 4 teachers and met for approximately 55 minutes on June 12, 2017. After the Focus Group meetings, I sent follow-up emails to all participants to ask if they had anything to add to the questions asked during the interviews. Only three of the seven teachers, Kristine (Focus Group 1), Kimberly (Focus Group 2), and Jenna (Focus Group 2), responded to this email.

The demographics for all the teachers in both focus groups are listed in Table 4.9. All seven participants were white, monolingual females. Their ages, educational backgrounds, years and degrees of experience can be found in the table. Their experience ranged from 7 to 26 years, all with additional coursework beyond a Master's degree. At the time of the interviews, the participants signed informed consent documents and chose their own unique pseudonyms.

Table 4.9						
<i>Focus Group Participant Demographics</i>						
Pseudonyms	Focus group	Age	Number of years teaching elementary grades	Current grade level (No. of years at this grade)	Other grade level and/or teaching experiences	Education
Jane	1	35	12	2 (8yrs)	3, pre-K	Master's +10
Mary	1	49	26	1 (2 years)	2, 4, Literacy coach, curriculum implementer	Master's +40 ESL Reading Specialist
Kristine	1	47	18	K (16 years)	1, 5	Master's +40, National Board Certified
Candy	2	38	7	1 (1 year)	K, 2	Master's +10, Reading Specialist
Kimberly	2	46	11	1 (10 years)	K	Master's +30
Jenna	2	41	12	1 (12 years)		Master's +16
Colette	2	44	8	K (3 years)	Pre-K	Master's +34

After transcribing both focus group interviews, the data were coded using the software QDA Lite. The discussion formed the following broad categories; professional learning, student factors, teacher factors, writing practices, and challenges. Within these categories, 41 subcategories were identified. The program ordered these subcategories according to number of words discussed in each category. For example, I coded the following part of the discussion added by Kristine under the categories “Motivation/enjoyment” and “Sharing.”

Another thing that motivated kinders is if we shared at the end. And when you run out of time you know sharing is important, I'd say, "OK, if you get your story done, if you finish up you can share it." So that kind of motivated them more to finish their work because they really wanted to read their own story. So, you have to give them a little incentive.

The program counted the number of words in each category and created a graph ranking the categories largest to smallest according to how much each was discussed. The highest-ranking topics were determined by using a modified scree test, as a scree plot provides a visual aid that helps identify the separation between the most important and least important components under investigation. The separation is determined visually at a point when there is a sharp drop-off in the frequencies, that is, when the slope of the scree plot changes dramatically. Focus Group 1 presented ten categories with the number of words in the remaining 31 categories falling off sharply. Focus Group 2 had eight categories of importance before a sharp decline in the amount of discussion. Table 4.10 shows the ranking of subcategories for each focus group according to the number of words coded in each category.

Table 4.10	
<i>Ranking of Subcategories by Number of Words (from highest to lowest)</i>	
<u>Focus Group 1</u>	<u>Focus Group 2</u>
Managing students	Curriculum
Adapting curriculum	Units of Study/Calkins
Foundational skills	Expectations of students
Conferencing	Choice
Units of Study/Calkins	Conferencing
Working with peers	Amount and kind of instruction
Reading/writing connection	Growth
Change across time	Shared writing
Writer's workshop model	
Goal setting	

Two subcategories were consistent for the two groups, *Conferencing* and *Units of Study/Calkins*. A third category, *Writer's Workshop model*, ranked ninth for Focus Group 1 and tenth for Focus Group 2. The discussions surrounding three of the subcategories ranked highly for one or both groups, namely, *Units of Study/Calkins*, *Working with Peers*, and *Curriculum*, all of which help to answer this first research question focused on the personal and professional experiences related to writing instruction.

Units of Study/Calkins. The first subcategory, *Units of Study/Calkins*, refers to any discussion surrounding the program created by Lucy Calkins and colleagues (2013) titled, *Units of study in opinion, information, and narrative writing: A Common Core curriculum*. This program had been purchased for all schools in the district sometime within the past four years, but was implemented with varying levels of fidelity. All teachers in the two focus groups currently use the program to some extent and discussed writing within the context of the program using the term *Units of Study* or just the name, Lucy Calkins.

Teachers often spoke about writing instruction in the context of the Calkins and Colleagues (2013) program which indicated how their professional learning around writing was affected by it. For example, Mary of Focus Group 1 (FG 1) reported,

I use Lucy Calkins and it does take a year for you to pretty carefully study, I guess you could say. But then we know Lucy is very verbose in her explanations. And you have to go through and the first-year highlight what's really important and what she really means.

She continued her thoughts about the program as follows:

That's probably the piece I like best, as well as they get to take topics of their choice. Because I get such a better quality of writing because they care about the topic that they're writing about. I'm not telling them to write about their summer vacation when I have kids that didn't get to go on summer vacation. So, you know I think that's some of the things that made a difference in my writing and how I've seen such growth. I mean of all the things we've done with writing, I have seen the most growth using Lucy Calkins.

Mary's comments showed that the program required time to learn but taught her to allow students to choose their own topics instead of choosing them for students. She valued this practice and consequently, saw more growth in students writing than in the past.

Colette of Focus Group 2 (FG2) also noted that the program allowed for students to use their own experiences to create pieces of writing, which was previously absent from her former writing instruction. She described one such instance as:

This is the part that I've realized after teaching my third year of Lucy Calkins. You know you get in and want them to be writing. But I realized that Lucy Calkins, especially in kindergarten, the whole point of that writing program is to get them in here (pointing to her head) thinking about stories and being able to tell stories.

According to both Mary and Colette, experience working with the program caused them to focus on student choice of topics and resulted in positive outcomes for writing.

Similarly, Kimberly and Kristine noted how the Units of Study/Calkins program affected their teaching practices. Kimberly (FG2) wrote her thoughts about professional learning as related to *Units of Study* in her response to the focus group follow-up email.

The most effective learning experiences I have received for writing instruction have been through professional development, specifically *Units of Study*. Not only professional development workshops, but collaboration with colleagues pertaining to *Units of Study*, has been very effective also.

Kristine (FG1) also reported similar thoughts in a follow-up email:

The PD for the current writing program by Lucy Calkins has enhanced my writing instruction. I felt that I was able to integrate it easily into what I had already been doing with nonfiction/informational writing. I was able to take that a step further and put their writing into books instead of a paragraph.

As evidenced here, the *Units of Study* program changed the way most of the teachers previously approached writing instruction, particularly because it afforded students the opportunity to choose their own topics and ideas about which to write. Participants also noted the professional learning they experienced as a result of working with the program, attending workshops on the subject, and working with colleagues on writing. Jenna noted how motivating her students found choosing their own topics compared to her former practice of providing writing prompts for them. For Focus Group 2, the subcategory of *Choice* ranked fourth among all categories, which represents an important instructional change consistent with research (Graham & Harris, 2015; Mo et al., 2014).

Curriculum. The second category, *Curriculum*, happens to be related to the *Units of Study/Calkins* category and ranked first in frequency of discussion by Focus Group 2. For all teachers in this district, the *Units of Study* program (Calkins and Colleagues, 2013) was the writing resource consistently available across all schools. The participants

in this group talked about other programs or practices that influenced their instruction such as shared writing, four square writing (Gould & Gould, 1999), Six-Trait writing (Spandel, 2009), Handwriting without Tears (Olsen, 1998), and Heggerty writing (2003). Comments were made by both focus groups that before *Units of Study*, there was no set curriculum or program in place for teachers to use consistently. The discussion about these other programs by the focus group participants revealed more of an awareness rather than a deep understanding due to consistent use. Kristine remarked, “I remember when I first started out, there wasn’t anything formal anywhere and we were all just kind of scrambling and trying to do our own thing.” The importance of having a writing curriculum was exemplified by Kimberly as follows,

Think about how many days you went without teaching writing because you didn’t really have anything in place and you thought, “Ok, we’ll get to that in social studies.” Or you did something for fun like we wrote a letter to mom for Mother’s Day or for the holiday. That’s how I would get writing in. Ok, we can’t get writing in today because, what are you going to do? I know it sounds silly but how many days did we not do writing because we didn’t have a writing program?

Some of what she described could be termed writing activities as opposed to writing instruction with a specific program. Her comments also speak to the sporadic nature of writing instruction. In a comment from an open-ended question on the survey, a respondent also noted the need for a writing curriculum. When asked to identify the greatest challenge to providing effective writing instruction, this individual wrote:

Finding a program or having a framework that covers the areas in writing that need to be addressed. I feel like I have received very little training in writing

instruction and I have had to take different components that I have learned throughout the years to teach my class but it is still not effective.

This comment not only spoke to this teacher's desire for a curriculum but also her lack of professional learning about how to teach writing.

Jenna (FG 2) also noted the change in her instructional practices due to having a writing program.

I used to do journal writing first thing when I would have, like a little topic or story starter or whatever on the board. That was kind of like, what they did when they first walked in. And now I look at what I do for writing compared to what I did at the very beginning of my career because there was no writing curriculum in place and you didn't really know any better. So, it's just how much farther these kids are now in their writing by the time they leave me and go on to second grade, it's just amazing.

The comments by focus group participants, as well as the survey respondent point to the teacher's perceptions of the importance of having a writing curriculum. While the *Units of Study* curriculum was made available to all teachers in the district, the materials were only meant to be resources available for teacher use but not mandated. The implementation of the curriculum was inconsistent across schools at the time of this study, as evidenced by the survey respondent. Teachers in the focus groups, though, reported how the *Units of Study* provided much needed professional learning for writing, as well as a structured, daily program that framed their writing practices. Other programs or practices used by these teachers in the past failed to offer enough support for teachers to result in consistent instruction for students.

Working with peers. The third topic discussed frequently by Focus Group 1 was the subcategory of *Working with peers*. The teachers most often mentioned pulling ideas for writing from grade-level teaching partners. One talked about the influence of a literacy coach and another mentioned a supportive principal. Kristine described her early experiences as follows:

There was a lot of time as a kindergarten teacher that you sit there in professional development or even institute days and you're like, blah, blah, blah. This is all for the upper kids. Then my teaching partners who were significantly older than me, and I only say that because they had a lot more experience than me. They turned around and we looked at each other and said, "We can gear this to kindergarten. There's absolutely no reason why we can't have kindergarteners state, 'I like sharks,' and tell three reasons why they like sharks." And we actually kind of started and it took us a long time but we did it sentence-by-sentence. And so that was my springboard probably ten years ago.

Kristine's comments detail the importance of working with her grade-level partners to adapt professional learning to meet specific kindergarten needs.

Similarly, the teachers in Focus Group 2 all worked at the same school sometime during the last four years. They also reported talking to each other about writing instruction and adjusting instructional practices. Kimberly, a first-grade teacher, reported that after talking to a kindergarten teacher, she started to use more shared writing again in the classroom because she could see the benefits exemplified by her incoming students early in the year. Jenna described the collaboration of the first-grade team when first working with *Units of Study*. The entire focus group also commented on the positive

effects of working with a specific kindergarten teacher at their school who modeled exemplary writing instruction using writer's workshop.

On the other hand, when teachers in both focus groups were asked to describe the quality of preparation for writing instruction received in their teacher licensure programs, they noted that the effects were few, using phrases like: "not a lot," "very little," "maybe none to be honest," and "I don't remember any." They reported that their methods classes focused primarily on teaching reading, rather than writing. Kristine noted that even if there had been specific pedagogy taught in college, it probably would not have pertained to what she now needs to know to teach kindergarten because she was working toward a K-9 license, and had to be prepared to teach writing for students across those grade levels. Thus, if she learned appropriate instructional practices for middle school, they would not have transferred well to her kindergarten instruction.

Comparing quantitative and qualitative data. The two data sets produced some common results related to teachers' personal and professional experiences concerning to writing instruction. Two broad categories, namely, professional learning and curriculum, seemed to have significant impact on teachers and their instruction.

Professional learning. When teachers were asked to rank the importance of experiences related to writing instruction on a scale of 1-5 on the survey, *Peer collaboration* ranked highest with a weighted average of 4.23 for all respondents and 4.57 for just the focus group members. This seems to coincide with the focus group discussions in which teachers talked about changing or adapting instruction as a result of working with grade-level partners. *Workshops or professional conference sessions on writing* ranked number two for all survey respondents with a weighted average of 3.83

and tied for *Peer collaboration* for most important for the focus group members.

Teachers in the focus group did not discuss this category of professional learning in great detail, noting only workshops as the organized learning experience affecting writing instruction. As previously evidenced in Kimberly's post-focus group follow-up email, professional development workshops and working with colleagues were effective at advancing her learning about writing instruction.

The effect of preparatory college or university coursework on teaching writing, on the other hand, was little to nonexistent in both data sets. The three survey questions concerning licensure ranked ninth, tenth, and thirteenth out of thirteen questions about teacher prior experiences. The discussions with both focus groups revealed that teachers felt few if any classes affected their writing instruction. Kimberly's response to the follow-up email summarized her thoughts as follows, "I cannot comment on the quality of preparation for writing instruction during my teacher licensure program as there was no preparation or instruction." Jenna noted strong feelings about the need for better university preparation as evidenced in her follow-up email. When asked why she joined the focus group in the first place, she responded:

I agreed to be a part of the focus group because I feel that there needs to be formal training for teachers in writing before they start their teaching careers! Due to the fact that reading and writing are related so closely, it is important that all pre-service teachers have formal training in both!

Kristine stated that she did not feel prepared in any way to teach writing from her teacher licensure program and remembered only taking literature courses and no writing courses.

Survey respondents and participants in the two focus groups all clearly felt a need for more preparation in university coursework for writing instruction.

Curriculum. The next topic, *Curriculum*, showed consistencies across both data sets. The survey asked teachers to indicate whether or not certain instructional practices were used to teach writing in their classrooms. Table 4.11 indicates the percentages of teachers that used those practices.

Table 4.11	
<i>Writing Instructional Practices</i>	
<u>Instructional Practice</u>	<u>Percentage of Teachers Who Employ the Practice to Teach Writing</u>
Writer's workshop	93%
Daily Five writing	93%
Shared/interactive writing	86%
Content area writing	85%
Guided reading with writing centers	78%
Commercial curriculum (basal) with writing centers	21%

It should be noted that the *Units of Study* curriculum employs the Writer's Workshop approach to teach writing. All teachers in both focus groups reported using this practice, as well as 93% of the survey respondents. The topic, *Units of Study/Calkins*, ranked highly in the discussions for both focus groups. In fact, the teachers spoke about several aspects of writing instruction in the context of the Writer's Workshop model, particularly adapting the curriculum to provide effective instruction. This seemed to be a common professional experience evidenced by discussion in both focus groups. Additional data on this topic came from an open-ended question on the survey. When teachers were asked about their greatest challenge to provide effective writing instruction, eight of the fifty-eight comments, almost 14%, addressed curriculum as being a

challenge. Five of these comments expressed the need for curricular materials, which is consistent with the focus groups teachers' comments about the need for a writing program. Although the *Units of Study* materials were made available to all teachers as a resource, the implementation and consistency of usage varied across district schools.

Other findings. Not all items from the survey were discussed during the focus group interviews. Conversely, the teachers brought up points during the interviews not mentioned on the survey. For example, *Reading professional literature* about writing was not specifically discussed during either of the focus groups, though statistical analysis of the survey resulted in moderate correlations between this professional practice and several other? instructional practices. This can be seen in the high correlation between *Instructing using mentor texts* with *Reading professional literature* ($r = .61$). Also related to *Reading professional literature*, are the teaching of several strategies (planning, drafting, revising, and editing) which resulted in moderate correlations ranging from $r = .40$ to $.51$. However, focus group teachers solely provided evidence that the *Units of Study* program affected their instruction. While the program may not be defined as professional literature, Mary's comments about the verbose nature of Lucy Calkins in her program hints at the amount of professional reading it includes. Within the *Units of Study*, each session includes a one-two page explanation of how the following lesson connects to prior teaching, situating instruction within the workshop model. The included text, *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop* (Calkins, 2013), also provides professional reading detailing the necessities of writing instruction, how the curriculum supports the writing standards, the materials needed to start a workshop model, as well as assessment and feedback suggestions. Throughout the series, Calkins provides the

teachers support for teaching writing with evidence from herself and other educators in the field.

Conversely, one discussion point brought up by the focus groups participants that was not included on the survey was that of teaching confidence as a result of having a writing program. Kimberly stated that,

Not that you want to teach out of a manual. But still, you're like, "I know what I'm doing for writing today. I'm going to add on to this little piece." I know exactly where I am. If we need to step back or we need to go forward. I have my plan for the day. I don't have to come up with something and reinvent the wheel.

Is this really effective? You know what I mean? I feel confident in having a plan.

Her thoughts indicated that having a writing program to follow took away some of the uncertainty of teaching writing because she did not have to consistently come up with her own ideas and materials for instruction. Jane expressed similar feelings about how the program affected her.

I feel a lot more confident in teaching it because we have something behind us.

I'm very excited about the things they come up with. Over the years now that we've been doing it awhile, we can see that they're really starting to bring things from first grade.

She also mentioned feeling validated by having a program to back up her teaching.

Similarly, Kimberly and Colette noted the way their teaching was affected by using the program, highlighting that they find things they can do better and have become more comfortable with it each passing year. The teachers in Focus group 2 all expressed how they appreciate teaching with the program now and how their students enjoy it as well.

Summary of findings from research question 1. The first research question examines teachers' personal and professional experiences related to writing instruction. Analysis of the data from both quantitative and qualitative sets result in the following trends.

1. Teachers benefited from working collaboratively with colleagues on writing instruction. By working with peers, teachers reported increased professional learning and improved instructional practices.
2. Reading professional literature, which in this study can be inferred as that which is included in the *Units of Study* program (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013), was positively related to the increased use of strategy instruction indicative of the Writer's Workshop model (planning, drafting, revising, and editing), especially for teachers with less than 15 years of teaching experience.
3. The use of a writing program (in this case, the *Units of Study*) was positively related to an increase in teachers' professional learning. It also enabled teachers to consistently allow students to choose their own topics for writing which they reported as increasing student motivation for writing. Focus group participants also reported an increase in self-confidence in teaching writing as a result of having a writing program.
4. Participants in this study reported that university teacher licensure programs had little to no effect on their writing instruction.

Research Question 2: What do these teachers say they value about writing instruction in their classrooms and why?

Quantitative data: Survey. To best address this research question, the findings from the following data sets were analyzed and are discussed, namely, Types of Student Writing Activities, Writing Instruction, Instructional Practices Used, and Student Actions. To begin, the means and standard deviations for Writing Instruction calculated on a scale of 1-5 resulted in the following ranking of importance for each item (see Table 4.12.) Survey respondents deemed traditional instructional skills such as *Teaching capitalization and punctuation* and *Teaching spelling skills* important and were ordered first and fourth on the list. An examination of this list shows the two items, *Model writing* and *Explicitly model writing strategies*, ranked second and third with *Model writing* rated nearly as high as *Teach capitalization and punctuation*. Ranked fifth in terms of importance was *Provide opportunities for journal/free writing*. Additionally, *Teaching strategies for planning* and *Teaching grammar skills* ranked near the middle of the list, while *Teaching handwriting skills* and specific strategies including *revising*, *drafting* and *editing*, along with *Having students copy from models* were the five lowest ranking items on the list.

The next section of the survey, Types of Student Writing Activities, asked teachers to value the significance of different types of writing activities on the same 1-5 scale. Table 4.13 orders the activities according to importance. *Independent writing* rated the highest with a mean of 4.22, far above the second highest rated item, *Writing in response to reading*. *Peer revision/editing*, on the other hand, came out at the bottom of the list with a mean of 2.95.

Table 4.12			
<i>Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items about Writing Instructional Practices</i>			
Item Description	Rank	Mean	Standard Deviation
Teach capitalization and punctuation skills	1	4.36	.66
Model writing	2	4.32	.57
Explicitly model writing strategies	3	4.03	.74
Teach spelling skills	4	3.97	.86
Provide opportunities for journal/free writing (with or without prompts)	5	3.95	.92
Provide mini-lessons based on perceived student need for writing skills or processes	6	3.90	.76
Conference with students about their writing	8	3.76	.82
Teach strategies for planning (e.g., brainstorming, organizing)	9	3.74	.89
Teach grammar skills	10	3.73	.85
Use a writing prompt (e.g., story starter, picture, physical object, etc.) to encourage writing	11	3.68	.95
Instruct using mentor texts	12	3.44	.91
Teach handwriting skills	13	3.41	.97
Teach strategies for revising	14	3.33	.87
Teach strategies for drafting	15	3.24	.94
Teach strategies for editing	16	3.20	.96
Have students copy from models	17	3.10	.94
Note: ^a n = 61			

Table 4.13			
<i>Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items about Types of Student Writing Activities</i>			
Item Description	Rank	Means	Standard Deviations
Independent writing	1	4.22	0.81
Writing in response to reading	2	3.85	0.87
Writing multiple genres	3	3.80	1.01
Publishing writing	4	3.68	0.96
Writing from a prompt	5	3.53	0.82
Use of writing checklists	6	3.25	1.09
Peer revision/editing	7	2.95	1.07
Note: ^a n = 61			

Next, the survey items about Writing Instruction were correlated with Types of Student Writing Activities using SPSS software. The results were examined and those items with correlations greater than .400 were chosen as significant enough to discuss. Two items, the *Use of writing checklists* and *Publishing writing*, showed moderate correlations with several items from the Writing Instruction section of the survey (see Tables 4.14 and 4.15.)

Table 4.14	
<i>Significant Correlations between the Use of Writing Checklists and Writing Instruction</i>	
<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Correlation (2-tailed)</u>
Instruct using mentor texts	.542 ^a
Teach strategies for planning (e.g., brainstorming, organizing)	.410 ^a
Teach strategies for drafting	.548 ^a
Teach strategies for revising	.506 ^a
Teach strategies for editing	.443 ^a
Note: ^a Correlation significant at the 0.01 level, n = 61	

Both items, the *Use of writing checklists* and *Publishing writing*, showed similar moderate correlations to the same five instructional practices; *Instruct using mentor texts*, *Teach strategies for planning*, *Teach strategies for drafting*, *Teach strategies for revising*,

Table 4.15	
<i>Significant Correlations between the Publishing Writing and Writing Instruction</i>	
<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Correlation (2-tailed)</u>
Instruct using mentor texts	.421 ^a
Teach strategies for planning (e.g., brainstorming, organizing)	.434 ^a
Teach strategies for drafting	.415 ^a
Teach strategies for revising	.594 ^a
Teach strategies for editing	.448 ^a
Note: ^a Correlation significant at the 0.01 level, ^b n = 61	

and *Teach strategies for editing*. The strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing are all part of a writer's workshop model of teaching that routinely requires students to publish writing. Writing checklists are also often employed by students to prepare for publishing their work. Interestingly, though, in the ranking of Writing Instruction items from the survey, *Teach strategies for planning*, *Instruct using mentor texts*, *Teach strategies for revising*, *Teach strategies for drafting*, and *Teach strategies for editing* ranked 9th, 12th, 14th, 15th, and 16th respectively. While analyses showed correlations between the items, teachers did not highly value strategy instruction compared to other instructional practices.

The final section from the survey, Student Actions, resulted in the following ranking of writing-related student undertakings (see Table 4.16). When asked how often

Table 4.16			
<i>Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Items about Student Actions</i>			
<u>Item Description</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Means</u>	<u>Standard Deviations</u>
Encourage students to use “invented spelling” at any point during the writing process	1	4.46	0.84
Allow students to select their own writing topics	2	3.80	0.71
Have students share their writing with peers	3	3.80	0.85
Have students engage in “planning” before writing	4	3.69	0.84
Have students “revise” their writing products	5	3.59	1.10
Have students use writing to support reading (e.g., write about something they read)	6	3.56	0.95
Have students “publish” their writing. (Print or write it so that it can be shared with others.)	7	3.14	1.00
Have students use reading to support writing (e.g., read to inform their writing)	8	3.03	0.94
Have students use rubrics or checklists to evaluate their own writing or that of their peers	9	2.85	1.18
Note: ^a n = 61			

teachers required their students to employ these actions, the use of “invented spelling” ranked at the top, far above the second and third highest rated items, *Allow students to select their own writing* and *Have students share their writing with peers*. *Planning*, *revising*, and *publishing* ranked in the middle of the list falling at 4th, 5th, and 7th respectively, while *Using rubrics or checklists to evaluate writing* ranked the lowest in importance. By highly ranking the use of “invented spelling,” teachers in this study show they tend to value a developmental stance in terms of writing instruction. Teachers may consider content more important than correctness by encouraging students to keep writing instead of spending time to correctly spell all the words in a composition. The emergent age of the students may also be a contributing factor as to why the formal self-evaluation of writing by checklists and rubrics ranked at the bottom of the list. Teachers may not consider the routine practice of using rubrics as important at this stage in students’ writing development.

Student Actions items were also correlated with Writing Instruction, with several highly significant moderate correlations evidenced in Table 4.17. Seven student actions correlated in varying degrees with four instructional practices, all involving strategy instruction. The table lists the correlations according to how items occurred on the survey rather than to correlated values.

As one may expect, the four teaching strategies related to the corresponding student actions. The strategies for planning and drafting correlated highly with the student action, *Have students engage in ‘planning’ before writing*, at .671 and .712 respectively. Also not surprising, the strategies for *planning*, *drafting*, *revising*, and *editing* all correlated highly to the corresponding student actions during writer’s

Table 4.17				
<i>Significant Correlations between Students Actions and Writing Instruction</i>				
	<u>Teach</u> <u>strategies for</u> <u>planning</u>	<u>Teach</u> <u>strategies for</u> <u>drafting</u>	<u>Teach</u> <u>strategies</u> <u>for revising</u>	<u>Teach</u> <u>strategies</u> <u>for editing</u>
Have students engage in “planning” before writing	.671 ^a	.712 ^a	.623 ^a	.529 ^a
Have students “revise” their writing products	.532 ^a	.481 ^a	.651 ^a	.422 ^a
Have students share their writing with peers	.556 ^a	.563 ^a		
Have students “publish” their writing	.514 ^a	.411 ^a	.563 ^a	.537 ^a
Have students use rubrics or checklists to evaluate their own writing or that of peers	.484 ^a	.443 ^a	.407 ^a	
Have students use writing to support reading	.479 ^a	.410 ^a	.455 ^a	.420 ^a
Have students use reading to support writing		.411 ^a	.423 ^a	
Note: ^a Correlation significant at the 0.01 level, n = 61				

workshop; *Have students engage in “planning” before writing*, *Have students “revise” their writing products*, and *Have students “publish” their writing*. The student action, *Have students share their writing with peers*, showed moderate correlations to the strategies for planning and drafting at .556 and .563 respectively. This could be explained by the format for the workshop model within the *Units of Study* program which suggests daily sharing of writing after students spent time planning and drafting their work. Finally, the moderate correlations for *Have students use writing to support reading* and *Have students use reading to support writing* to several of the writing strategies speaks to teachers’ knowledge of the reciprocal nature of reading and writing processes.

Qualitative data: Focus group interviews. The seven teachers in the two focus groups talked about many topics as they explained what they value about writing instruction and why they employ certain practices in their classrooms. As previously noted, the use of the *Units of Study* program figured prominently in teachers' classrooms (see Table 4.10). Conversation about the Writer's Workshop model in general ranked eighth for Focus Group 1 in terms of the number of words recorded and tenth for Focus Group 2. Specific to the model, conferencing with students ranked highly during both focus group discussions; fourth for Focus Group 1 and the fifth for Focus Group 2. Additionally, foundational skills and the reading/writing connection were important topics for Focus Group 1. Providing students with choice in writing, using a shared writing model, and the amount and kind of instruction were important topics for Focus Group 2. An examination of these categories helps to answer the question of what these teachers valued about writing instruction.

Writer's workshop model/Units of Study. All teachers in both focus groups reported using *Units of Study* to some extent, as they discussed the structure, procedures, and adaptation of the program. Because the curriculum was provided as a resource for teachers but not mandated, not all teachers in the district used the materials. Within this model, the idea of giving students choice in what they write about was the fourth highest overall topic discussed for Focus Group 2. In fact, one participant noted that this was the piece that she liked best about the program because it motivated students and resulted in better writing. Another spoke about how letting the students use their own ideas instead of giving them topics to write about motivated them to want to do a good job. When talking about how she feels about teaching writing, Mary said, "I've always loved

writing, so this just makes it even more exciting because you get to know the kids better. With Lucy Calkins, you give them free choice.” Participants in this study valued allowing students to decide on their own topics for writing.

Both focus groups discussed different procedural aspects of writer’s workshop. Jane articulated how the management of the workshop model affected writing instruction.

How they understand how that is set up. Starting with the teacher teaching a lesson, they go off and do it. The teacher jumps in with some highlighted point. They continue working for a little bit. And then get to sharing time at the end, [with] them understanding how that all works.

Jane described the consistent format recommended by the program and how students’ understanding improved instruction. Both groups talked about the importance of students knowing the procedures and processes as a result of their current regular writing instruction, as well as instruction from previous years. They also felt that because students had already been exposed to these procedures, they knew what to expect during writing time.

Kristine, a veteran kindergarten teacher, also reported how her writing instruction has changed because of using the Writer’s Workshop model.

I do more of it. More actual instructing of writing instead of just... When I first started out, it was like just draw pictures and if it’s a rainbow, that’s fine. Now I actually want them to have sentences and things like that with it. Before was like 18 years ago and it was okay if you don’t have any. It’s fine.

Her comments speak to an increase in the amount of writing instruction as well as an increase in expectations for her students compared to when she began teaching 18 years

ago. She also noted that early in her career, the kindergarten students only attended for a half day so there were many changes to the curriculum since that time.

Conferencing with students. A second topic discussed in detail by both groups was conferencing with students during Writer's Workshop. For Focus Group 1, this topic ranked third for the number of words and fifth for Focus Group 2.

Much of the discussion had to do with how teachers managed this piece of the workshop. Jane expressed that she is still trying to figure out what works best in her classroom. She stated, "So I've tried doing groups. I've tried doing just kids. And I'm still not finding what works. I'm trying to figure that out." Focus Group 2 discussed conferencing for a long stretch with all four teachers commenting on what works best for them. Jenna highlighted how formerly she used a set meeting schedule with each student on a different day of the week. Then she changed her conferences to meet her students' needs.

I set it up to where my kids come to me when they're ready. Instead of, "I'm going to see this person. I'm going to see that person." Because then you run into someone being gone and then they don't get to be seen until next Monday because they're not on the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday list. And so, I just think that that really helped my class, I don't know. My kids made great growth this year in writing. I did it that way the whole year. They would get up and come when they were ready.

Jenna's comments evidence not only that she values conferring with students, but also that she adjusts her instruction and procedures to fit their needs. Kimberly added that she worked conferences the same way but also kept a checklist. When she noticed that she

had not met with a student in a while, she then scheduled a conference with that child the following day. Candy articulated that having a set conference schedule often interrupted the student's writing process when they weren't ready to meet with the teacher. Colette added that she always records students' writing topics during conferences, and noted: "So when the kid comes back to conference with me, I want to know if it's the same book that we conferenced about last week or whenever it was or has that kid moved on to another book." Colette also reported that she positioned struggling students in close proximity to her so she could keep them writing or help them more often as she conferenced with other students. While most of the Focus Group discussions focused on managing the conferencing piece, it was clear that all the teachers in both focus groups valued discussing writing with their students on an individual basis.

Foundational skills. For Focus Group 1, the topic of foundational skills ranked highly in the discussion, placing fourth on their list for the number of words recorded. Capitalization, punctuation, spacing, and handwriting were the items most often discussed. Kristine, the kindergarten teacher, spoke about why these factors were keys in her writing instruction.

I am really big in making sure they've got their handwriting and they've got a bunch of phonics down so they can't come to me and say, "I don't know how." They have enough background where I can say, "What do you hear?" and if all they hear is one letter, that's fine. But they actually make a good attempt. But that takes until Thanksgiving. So, I work really hard on that.

Jane added that as a second-grade teacher, she is glad kindergarten works on the foundations because she has to stress capital letters and ending punctuation. Candy also

articulated the following about explicitly teaching these skills; “I think it really helps too with the conventions, the mechanics part of it, because they see in the shared writing every day, the capital letter that you put. The finger spaces.” She expressed the importance of teaching some of these skills whole group and then individually during student conferences.

Shared writing. In relation to foundational skills, Focus Group 2 discussed another context for writing instruction important to them. Shared writing was an instructional method used by all teachers in the second focus group to explicitly teach writing skills. Shared writing completed during whole group instruction models how to write as together, the teacher and students construct a written piece. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) define and describe the practice as follows:

In shared writing, the teacher and students compose a text together. The teacher is the scribe. You may work on a chart displayed on an easel, on a smart board, or computer with screen display. Students participate in the composition of the text word by word, and reread it many times. Sometimes, especially with younger students, the teacher asks students to say the word slowly or to divide it into syllables as they think about how a word is spelled. At other times, the teacher (with student input) writes a word quickly on the chart. The text becomes a model, example or reference for student writing and discussion. (p. 163)

Candy, a kindergarten teacher at the time, broached this topic, recalling a previous conversation with her colleague Kimberly, a first-grade teacher. She expressed regret that more recently they completed less shared writing than in the past.

I feel that maybe one of the first times ever that I thought, ‘ok, maybe it’s working’ was when you (pointed to Kimberly) came to me one year and said, “Oh my god. Everyone of your kids that I got can write.” And I think back to that and that’s when I did shared writing in kindergarten every single day. Every day. We did it together.

In her follow-up email, Kristine expressed a similar sentiment about the importance of shared writing but regrets doing less in order to teach writer’s workshop.

I had to give up “share the pen” type activities. I think they are powerful activities and kids learn a lot from them. Kinders need a lot of repetition and share the pen helps with repetition. They need to see in action some of the writing practices I am teaching and share the pen does that.

Teachers in Focus Group 2 discussed the importance of modeling foundational skills and conventions during shared writing, including letter formation, punctuation, capitalization, and spacing. Candy felt that shared writing helped solidify those skills for students by explicitly modeling the writing process. Jenna added that she starts the year with a lot of shared writing to teach the structure of a sentence because she believed that many students come to first grade without that knowledge. She said, “For some of those kindergarteners that come in and don’t know the structure of a sentence, we can’t even start.” Although all four teachers in Focus Group 2 articulated the value of shared writing, they reported finding it difficult to employ both shared writing and writer’s workshop during their literacy block.

Reading/writing connection. The importance of the connection between reading and writing was also noted by both groups and ranked seventh highest in the number of

words recorded for Focus Group 1. The participants talked about the back and forth nature of students in which they read what they have written and then continue to write. Mary attributed the correlation between reading and writing as the reason that her students' reading ability began to "skyrocket."

And that's the only thing I can attribute it to that's different. I'm not doing my guided (reading) really any different than I would. My stations are pretty much the same. But I've added and been consistent in my writing instruction. They're just taking off with their reading.

Candy talked about the emphasis made by the administration to teach reading and math but not writing. But for her, reading and writing cannot be separated.

It's totally a package deal. I don't know. To me they are for comprehension and fluency. Writing builds fluency. When you were saying, having it in here (points to her head) and putting it on here (points to paper), that's a fluency type piece for me, to be able to fluently get your thoughts out.

Kristine also noted the importance of the reading/writing connection, particularly for her struggling students. She said, "It just gives them a little bit of a boost. And you know, trying to build that confidence. So, if you can do this in writing, you can do this in reading, too."

Finally, Jenna talked about the importance of having more formal training in writing instruction for pre-service teachers because reading and writing are so closely related. She felt that teachers are prepared to teach reading after graduation, but that they are not equally equipped to teach writing.

Amount and kind of instruction. This topic fell under the category of what focus group teachers considered challenges to writing instruction. For Focus Group 2, the amount and kind of writing instruction ranked sixth in importance. Teachers in both groups talked about the lack of emphasis on writing instruction, the lack of a curriculum, and the importance of consistency in instruction. Kimberly reported that for a long time, writing was put on “the back burner” because nobody thought it was important. Jane said writing often “got dropped out of the day.” She felt teachers had to choose between teaching either science, social studies, or writing simply because they could not fit everything into the schedule in a day.

Focus Group 2 had a conversation about the importance of having a writing curriculum and teaching it consistently across grade levels and across the district. Jenna related her feelings about the fact that her first-grade students had previously worked with *Units of Study*.

It makes a huge difference if they’ve had it in kindergarten, if the kindergarten teacher has done it faithfully. If you look at just the kids who were here, that you get that were actually at our school and move on to first grade, it makes a humongous difference. And I’ll take (names a kindergarten teacher) for example. The kids that I got from her room this year, you could tell they had done it faithfully.

The participants related their frustrations about getting students from other schools in the district who could not describe anything about writing instruction at their previous school. In reference to the district lacking a specified writing curriculum, Jenna asserted; “That’s the problem with the district not coming around and saying, ‘Ok. This is what we

are using. Everyone is using it.” Kristine also emphasized the importance of having a common curriculum and consistency across grade levels as follows:

Go to 3r's (teacher supply store) and buy a book from there. Find a book online from there. Try this, that, and the other thing, but having this and actually knowing that grades beyond me are using it also. If I'm not doing it, I'm not helping those teachers. I'm not helping them out so I'm not helping myself out. It will be like, “Oh man, there's another one of Kristine's kids,” doesn't know how to do any of this stuff.

Finally, Kimberly felt that although the entire district does not use the same curriculum, students who transfer in from other schools are often even further behind in writing simply because they may have had no such instruction at all.

Comparing quantitative and qualitative data. The two data sets presented some commonalities in what teachers say they value about writing instruction. These results can be organized into three categories presented in no particular order: writing instruction, student actions, and challenges to writing (See Table 4.18).

Writing instruction. Several writing practices showed similar trends in both the quantitative and qualitative data sets. First, as previously stated, 93% of the survey respondents reported using a Writer's Workshop model to teach writing (See Table 4.11.) This is consistent with the highest-ranking topics in both focus groups, *Conferencing*, *Writer's Workshop*, and *Units of Study*, all of which ranked in the top ten categories of codes by the number of words recorded for each. *Conferencing* ranked third for Focus Group 1 and fourth for Focus Group 2. When the term was searched in the transcripts

Table 4.18		
<i>What Teachers Say about Writing Instruction Common to Both Data Sets</i>		
	<u>Valued</u>	<u>Not emphasized</u>
<u>Writing Instruction</u>		
Writer's Workshop	X	
Shared Writing	X	
Conferencing	X	
Invented spelling	X	
Grammar		X
Handwriting		X
<u>Student Actions</u>		
Students sharing writing	X	
Student Choice in topics	X	
<u>Challenges</u>		
Time for instruction	X	
Time for conferencing	X	
Lack of foundational skills	X	

using the QDA Miner software, it was found to have been discussed 21 different times across both groups. On the survey, *Conference with students about writing* ranked 7 out of 17 items in the writing practices section. Focus Group 2 participants discussed the practice of shared writing enough to be seventh on their list of topics according to the number of words spoken about the topic. The survey also showed the importance of shared writing by 86% of the respondents reporting the use of this practice. In summary, the practices valued by both survey respondents and focus group participants included writer's workshop, shared writing, and conferring with students about writing.

Three writing skills were also common in both data sets. First, the topic of "Invented spelling" was mentioned eight distinct times during the focus group interviews. On the survey, *Teach spelling skills* ranked 4 out of 17 instructional practices. In the Student Actions section of the survey, *Encourage students to use 'invented spelling*

ranked first in importance to teachers. Spelling seemed to be another topic of importance evidenced in both data sets.

The next two skills, grammar and handwriting, lacked importance according these data sets as grammar was only mentioned once during focus group discussions and on the survey, *Teach grammar skills* ranked 10 out of 17. Finally, the topic of handwriting was mentioned only twice during the focus group discussions and *Teach handwriting skills* fell 13 out of 17 in that section of the survey.

Student actions. Two topics from this category showed similar trends in both the quantitative and qualitative data sets. First, participants in both focus groups noted the importance of students sharing their writing. Not to be confused with the instructional practice of shared writing, “sharing” here is a distinct section at the end of each session in the *Units of Study* program that participants reported using to motivate their young writers. This sharing time was mentioned 12 distinct times across the two focus groups. On the survey, *Have students share their writing with peers* ranked similarly in importance coming in at 2 out of 9 student actions.

Second, the topic of “choice” was a common thread in both data sets, as it was the fourth most discussed topic for Focus Group 2, although Mary from Focus Group 1 highlighted its importance on two separate occasions as well. The survey results showed the item *Allow students to select their own writing topics* ranked 2 out of 9 student actions.

Challenges. This section was not a separate category of questions on the survey but came in the form of an open-ended question at the end that asked respondents to answer the prompt, “What is your greatest challenge to providing effective writing

instruction?” There were 58 responses to this question with some individuals listing more than one challenge. These responses fell into six different categories, with one of the two most frequently mentioned being “time,” (16 of 58 responses). This is consistent with discussions during the focus groups coded as “amount of writing instruction.”

Participants expressed the pressure of having sufficient time to provide appropriate writing instruction under the time constraints of the day. The next challenge common in both data sets also involved time but was specifically related to conferencing. Five of the sixteen survey responses to this question detailed not having enough time to conference and provide feedback to students about their writing. This finding was consistent in focus group discussions as well.

Finally, the topic of foundational skills was common to both focus group discussions and this survey question. Sixteen respondents also commented on conditions which were categorized as “student factors,” examples which include meeting all students’ needs, getting students focused and motivated to write, as well as having sufficient foundational skills in writing. Of these 16 comments, six were specifically related to a lack in foundational skills such as letter knowledge, spelling, and handwriting. Additionally, in the section on student actions, the item *Encourage students to use ‘invented spelling’ at any point during the writing process* ranked first in importance according on the survey. The topic of foundational skills was also the fourth highest ranking topic for Focus Group 1.

Summary of findings from research question 2. Research question 2 examines what teachers say they value about writing instruction and why they believe what they

report. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data can be summarized as follows:

1. Teachers reported valuing two distinct writing instructional contexts, Writer's Workshop and shared writing. During the workshop model, conferencing with students was a practice consistently discussed, not only as beneficial to writing but challenging to complete. Teachers also valued the use of invented spelling in all instructional contexts.
2. The lack of discussion during the focus groups and on survey rankings indicate that the topics of handwriting and grammar were not emphasized as much as other instructional practices.
3. Teachers valued two student actions as beneficial to effective writing instruction, namely, sharing their writing and choosing their own topics.
4. Teachers commonly reported two challenges to writing instruction, the first of which involved time. Comments indicated a need for more time in the day to provide enough writing instruction, as well as to conference with students about their writing. The second challenge involved teachers' perceptions that students lack enough foundational skills to write effectively.

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between teacher's writing experiences and their classroom practices in writing?

The answer to this question requires an examination of all data collected in the survey and focus group discussions. Teachers' experiences (both personal and professional) and practices were detailed in relationship to the previous two research questions above, but the relationships between the two may be more difficult to clearly

delineate. In order to do so, the quantitative data of teachers' experiences and instructional practices will first be examined, followed by the qualitative data related to the same topics. Finally, trends which indicate possible relationships between teachers' experiences and practices will be examined.

Quantitative data concerning teachers' experiences and instructional practices. The survey identified several significant teacher experiences and instructional practices as evidenced in Table 4.19, with working in collaboration with others and reading professional literature highly valued teacher experiences. Participants also reported several significant practices including modeling writing, teaching for correctness, and providing time for students to write.

Table 4.19	
<i>Survey Findings Regarding Teacher Experiences and Instructional Practices</i>	
<u>Significant Teacher Experiences</u>	<u>Significant Instructional Practices</u>
Peer collaboration	Teaching capitalization and punctuation
Working with a literacy coach or reading specialist	Teaching spelling
Working with a colleague mentor	Model writing
Reading professional literature	Explicitly model writing
	Provide opportunities for journal/free writing
	Independent writing
	Writer's workshop
	Daily Five writing

Teachers' experiences related to writing. The findings from the survey regarding teachers' experiences related to writing instruction showed two trends of significance. Table 4.19 shows that working in collaboration with others and reading professional literature share several common instructional practices. Survey respondents highly ranked working in collaboration with others, and the items *Peer collaboration*, *Working with a*

literacy coach or reading specialist, and *Working with a colleague mentor* ordered first, third, and fourth on the list of experiences respectively. Teachers tended to value working with others while learning about writing instruction.

Second, the importance of learning by reading was also evidenced in the quantitative data. *Reading professional literature* corresponded with five separate instructional practices: *Instruct using mentor texts* and *Teaching strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing* (See Table 4.17.) *Reading professional literature* also ranked highly for teacher experiences, falling 5 out of 13 on the list. The experience of reading professional texts, whether alone, in a book study, or in preparation for teaching may possibly affect classroom writing practices. In this research particularly, participants using the *Units of Study* program were required to read a great deal of text to teach each lesson.

Writing practices, instructional practices, and student activities. Next, items concerning writing practices, instructional practices used, and student activities are examined (see Table 4.17). When teachers were asked to value certain writing practices on a scale of 1-5, two trends appeared. The traditional practices of *Teaching capitalization and punctuation*, as well as *Teaching spelling skills* ranked first and fourth on the list of Writing Instructional Practices respectively (see Table 4.12.) *Encouraging students to use “invented spelling”* also ranked first on the list of Student Actions (See Table 4.16). Items two and three on the Writing Instruction list, *Model writing* and *Explicitly model writing strategies*, were also deemed highly important. Fifth on that same list, *Provide opportunities for journal/free writing* coincides with *Independent writing* which ranked first on the list of Student Writing Activities. Finally, on the list of

Instructional Practices Used, 93% of survey respondents reported using both writer's workshop and Daily Five writing.

The following qualitative data from the focus group interviews also provided insight into determining whether a relationship existed for the participating teachers in regard to their writing experiences and classroom practices in writing.

Qualitative data concerning teachers' experiences and instructional practices. The findings from the focus group interviews revealed several factors that affected the participating teachers' instruction (see Table 4.20).

Teacher experiences related to writing. Three subcategories of codes which helped describe teachers' experiences concerning writing instruction were Units of Study/Calkins, curriculum, and working with peers. The *Units of Study* program, used by all teachers in both focus groups to some degree, was reported to have provided professional learning about writing instruction. Teachers discussed various ways in which their instruction changed after using the

Table 4.20		
<i>Focus Group Findings Regarding Teacher Experiences and Instructional Practices</i>		
<u>Significant Teacher Experiences</u>	<u>Instructional Contexts</u>	<u>Significant Instructional Practices</u>
Units of Study/Calkins Curriculum Working with peers	Writer's workshop model Shared writing	Explicit teaching Writing in different genres Differentiation Teaching foundational skills Connecting reading and writing Giving students choice Common instructional language

program as detailed earlier in this chapter. A second subcategory related to Units of Study was that of curriculum. Teachers articulated the importance of having a writing curriculum used consistently across grade levels, schools, and the district as a whole. They communicated curricular changes experienced over time, periods of times when there was a lack of teaching materials, of having to adjust their instruction, and the effects of the current curriculum, *Units of Study*. The final subcategory, working with peers, was mentioned throughout the discussions in terms of working with grade level partners, a literacy coach, or an administrator. The teachers in Focus Group 2 specifically mentioned working with one other and other staff members to study, implement, and adjust components of the writing program, *Units of Study*.

Writing instructional practices. The teachers in the focus groups discussed many instructional practices they considered important to writing, mostly within two instructional contexts. The first and most consistent context for teaching writing across the two groups was the Writer's Workshop model. Teaching in this format provided the basis for several instructional practices common to teachers in both groups. The structure of this instructional model was described by one teacher as first, teaching a lesson, then giving students time to write while she conferred with students, stopping the process to highlight an important point from the lesson, and finally, sharing student writing at the end. Each piece of the workshop format was discussed to a different degree, with conferring ranked highly as third and fifth for both groups. Teachers in the focus groups also employed some common language when talking about writing instruction, in particular, the term "small moments," specific to the *Units of Study* program, was used several times by teachers in both focus groups. They also talked about having students

write “how-to” books and using mentor texts to teach author’s craft. Additionally, teachers discussed the importance of students learning the language of Writer’s Workshop so they could progress more efficiently in their skills each year. This workshop model was seen to provide a framework for explicit teaching, writing in different genres, differentiating for student abilities, teaching foundational skills, connecting reading and writing, and giving students choice in writing topics.

The second instructional context distinct from the workshop model discussed by Focus Group 2 was that of shared writing. Teachers in this group expressed the importance of using this practice for explicitly teaching foundational skills like capitalization and punctuation. The first-grade teachers in this group used shared writing at the beginning of the year before starting Writer’s Workshop to review what students had learned in kindergarten. One teacher also discussed the use of this method to teach the structure of a sentence. These educators expressed the importance of taking time to use the shared writing approach due to the impact it can have on students, as exemplified in Candy’s statement below:

I remember days looking at the clock and thinking, “Oh my gosh. We’re still doing this.” But they got it. It stuck with them and they could apply it next year. I think we get away from a lot of that shared stuff because our day is so packed with everything else that people forget the importance of learning it from somebody, like just explicitly sitting and learning it.

Relationships between teachers’ experiences and classroom practices. The teachers who participated in this study, both by survey and in the focus groups, all work within the same school district which provided them with the writing program, *Units of*

Study (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013) as a resource for writing instruction. While not a mandated curriculum, the findings from the survey showed that 93% of respondents indicated that they used a writer's workshop model to teach writing. This number represents 29% of all kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers in this district. The Writer's Workshop model provided the basis for much of the discussion during the focus group interviews. Table 4.21 summarizes commonalities between the quantitative and qualitative data and is used to help discuss the findings and what relationship might exist between these teachers' writing experiences, both personal and professional, and their classroom practices in writing.

Table 4.21	
<i>Common Findings for Both Data Sets</i>	
<u>Significant Teacher Experiences</u>	<u>Significant Instructional Practices</u>
Peer collaboration	Writer's workshop model
Reading professional literature/curriculum	Teaching foundational skills
	Explicit writing instruction

As noted above, this research question examines the data to determine whether any relationships exist between teachers' writing experiences and their classroom practices. The most common thread throughout the data revolved around teachers' use of the Writer's Workshop model. The survey indicated that a majority of the respondents used the model to teach writing. The focus group data confirmed this with *Units of Study* and *Curriculum* being major topics of discussion. Specific to this model, both data sets revealed that these teachers valued explicit teaching/modeling of writing and the teaching of foundational skills such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. The survey item, *Reading professional literature*, may also be an experience related to the workshop

model in this case. This is because the *Units of Study* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013) program provides four units at each grade level with approximately twenty lessons in each. The lessons themselves are lengthy requiring teachers to first read an introduction which contextualizes the lesson within the unit, often providing the research justifying the instructional practices. Inherently, this program provides professional literature about writing instruction for daily teacher development.

Another trend common to both data sets involved the importance of peer collaboration. On the survey, peer collaboration ranked first for teacher experiences related to writing instruction. The topic ranked sixth for Focus Group 1 and in the upper half of all topics (17th of 36 topics) for Focus Group 2. Kristine spoke about how working with colleagues was important for adapting writing instruction to fit kindergarteners. The first-grade teachers in Focus Group 2 discussed how they taught writing in similar ways, specifically making adaptations at the beginning of the year. The same teachers articulated the need for more sharing between colleagues, not just for curriculum but also for instructional practices. Colette felt strongly about the need for face-to-face interactions with others as evidenced by the following comments:

Let me tell you about, this is my opinion about college and education and learning about how to teach kids to write. I think online classes are a bad thing too because I think that sitting in a room like this with other people is how you learn something. I learn more from sitting with you than from a computer in online classes. Too many of these colleges are getting away from classroom exposure because it's convenient to be online. You are missing a big piece of the puzzle. I think that as educators, team building and team planning and working

together...your goal this year should be getting your team to do new things. I think that's what you have to do. The problem is people get too set in their ways and they're not willing to try new things.

Colette continued her comments by describing the quality of education she received for her Master's degree as a part of a cohort of 30 other educators. She felt that she learned more from others in her courses than she could in an online course or from reading books.

The experience of using a common curriculum to teach a writer's workshop approach in a collaborative manner seemed to have positive effects on writing instructional practices. While learning to use this model, teachers read the materials and worked together to provide writing instruction for their students. Writing was modeled explicitly emphasizing foundational skills common in traditional writing instruction. Writer's Workshop provided the format for teachers to deliver writing instruction on a daily basis for their students.

Summary of findings from research question 3. The third and final research question seeks to determine if there exist any relationships between teachers' writing experiences, both personal and professional, and their classroom practices in writing. While this study cannot definitively determine causation between experiences and practices, the data suggest the following possible conclusions.

1. The common curriculum, in this case *Units of Study* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013), provided a basis for similar teacher experiences related to writing instruction. Teachers reported using this Writer's Workshop approach to teaching

which resulted in an increased amount of writing instruction and consequently, the amount of time students spent writing.

2. Reading the professional learning included in the common curriculum was often accomplished in a collaborative nature. Teachers reported valuing working with peers both on the survey and in the focus groups. These experiences also affected writing instruction as evidenced by comments made by focus group participants.
3. Teachers' experiences with the curriculum also resulted in more explicit instruction of writing strategies (planning, drafting, revising, editing) and that of foundational skills.

The conclusions from this research along with limitations, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This mixed-methods study sought to examine the personal and professional experiences of early elementary teachers related to writing to determine if there are common relationships between their experiences which are related to self-reported instructional practices. The quantitative portion of the research included a survey of kindergarten, first, and second-grade teachers in a large urban district examining their experiences related to writing instruction. Next for the qualitative portion of the study, two focus group interviews were conducted with a total of seven survey respondents. The focus group participants offered their personal voices to the research by discussing their personal and professional experiences with writing and how these experiences affect their classroom practices. Finally, the data were compared and analyzed to determine common themes and outcomes for the research. In this chapter, I present conclusions and a discussion related to the research questions and possible implications for practice, present limitations, and suggest questions for future research.

Conclusions

The two data sets raised distinct, as well as common conclusions leading to answers to the research questions set forth. This section will list the research questions and corresponding conclusions with a discussion to follow.

Research question 1. What are the personal and professional experiences of early elementary (K-2) teachers related to writing?

Conclusions. The teachers in the study valued collaborating with peers (grade level partners, literacy coaches, or principals) to improve instructional writing practices. The collaboration occurred most often in the form of lesson planning and reading

professional literature. Participants also reported the value of using a common writing program or curriculum for providing professional learning about writing as well as consistency in instructional practices. Finally, teachers reported little or no effect on their writing instruction as a result of work in their teacher licensure programs.

Research question 2: What do these teachers say they value about writing instruction in their classrooms and why?

Conclusions. The teachers in the study reported using shared writing and Writer's Workshop to teach writing. Within these contexts, conferring with students was valued but offered its own challenges to complete due to time constraints. Teachers also promoted students' use of invented spelling during Writer's Workshop and shared writing experiences. Handwriting and grammar instruction, conversely, were not valued as highly by participants in this study.

Research question 3: Is there a relationship between teacher's writing experiences and their classroom practices in writing?

Conclusions. The teachers in this study all reported using the Writer's Workshop model to teach writing due to the nature of the *Units of Study* materials provided by the district. Participants described an increase in writing instruction due to the use of this common curriculum. The amount of embedded professional reading within the series affected writing instruction as well. This reading was often discussed as teachers collaborated to plan writing lessons. This curriculum may also have affected the explicit instruction of writing strategies and foundational writing skills.

Discussion

Three themes, namely peer collaboration, Writer's Workshop, and curriculum, are used to organize this discussion and bring coherence to the study as a whole.

Peer collaboration. The first theme involves teachers working together to increase their learning about writing instruction and improve their instructional practices. Both the survey and focus group discussions showed collaboration as influential for the participating teachers. On the survey, *Peer collaboration* resulted in a mean of 4.23 out of 5 for importance. In addition, *Working with a literacy coach or literacy specialist* and *Working with a colleague or mentor* presented means of 3.63 and 3.61 respectively. Teachers in both focus groups also discussed instances in which collaboration affected their writing instruction. For Focus Group 1, working with peers ranked sixth among all categories in their discussion.

Research supports the idea of peer collaboration for teachers in terms of professional learning, as Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (2011) states that "effective professional development involves teachers both as learners and as teachers and allows them to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role" (p. 82). These researchers state that professional development, "must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers" (p. 82). However, in U.S. public schools, collaboration has not been common practice. Murray (2012) asserts that schools have not been strong in this tradition, instead noting that "an egg-crate culture has been the norm, whereby each teacher spends most of his or her day in a single room separated from other adults" (Building Strong Collaborative Relationships section). He called for schools to work

toward establishing more collaborative environments, something which clearly aligns with the way participants in this study highlighted their value for collaborating with others about writing instruction. Because writing instruction presents challenges, with one of the greatest being a lack of preparation in teacher licensure programs, collaboration of practicing teachers presents an effective way for them to improve their professional knowledge about instructional practices.

While the teachers in this study expressed their views on the importance of collaboration with peers, their rationale for this, and context within which they would like this to occur were not clearly apparent in their discussions or in the survey data. It may be that the answer to why teachers wish to collaborate may parallel their motives for participating in the study. Although they chose to take part in, and contribute to the focus groups for different reasons, it can be inferred that they may have an interest in improving their writing instruction. For example, Jenna stated that she participated in the study because she felt there needs to be more formal training for teachers before they start teaching. Kristine commented that she sought more ideas from others about teaching writing. Thus, these teachers signaled the way they value collaboration just by agreeing to participate in the study.

As noted above, the context in which teachers collaborate, or wish to collaborate about writing was also not clearly delineated by the data. The first-grade teachers in Focus Group 2 spoke about planning together as a team while learning how to use the *Units of Study* program. They discussed trying to stay together in the curriculum, adjusting instruction for their particular groups of students, and convincing other teachers that the program worked. Kristine talked about working with more experienced grade-

level partners to adjust professional development to best meet the needs of her kindergarten students. All the teachers in Focus Group 2 agreed that there should be more sharing of ideas in terms of writing instruction.

Writer's workshop. The next theme of importance that study participants identified involved the context of writing instruction. The survey respondents, 93% of whom indicated the use of Writer's Workshop, valued the practice as an approach to teaching writing. Additionally, all focus group participants reported using the model as a basis for instruction. Survey respondents indicated using components of the model (use of writing checklists, publishing writing, and sharing writing), which correlated positively to several writing instruction strategies, namely, planning, drafting, revising, and editing. While these strategies are not exclusive to Writer's Workshop, their use by the majority of respondents indicates a relationship to this model.

Likewise, most of the focus group participants reported using the Writer's Workshop model to some extent to teach writing. This instructional context supported explicit strategy instruction through the use of mentor texts and the teaching of foundational writing skills. Teachers discussed differentiation for students, with individual support provided during writing conferences. They also noted that this model helped support the explicit connection between reading and writing, as evidenced when Jane referred to it as "the back and forth piece of not just writing, but reading what you wrote." Finally, this approach to instruction allowed for student choice in writing topics and the sharing of writing, both of which teachers reported as motivating for them. Interestingly, the Writer's Workshop model employs the study of models, sharing

writing, and the giving and receiving of feedback, all of which are research-based effective practices but missing from the CCSS (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013).

By using the workshop model, teachers' professional knowledge about writing instruction deepened, which ultimately resulted in an increase in the amount of writing instruction. As noted earlier, the particular program used by teachers in this study, *Units of Study for Writing* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013), inherently required a considerable amount of professional reading. Calkins asserted that "this series will have done its job well if it not only helps you to teach the units described to good effect, but if it also encourages you to work collaboratively with your colleagues to author your own units of study" (Calkins, 2013, p. 87). The *Units of Study* program was designed to provide not just a curriculum for teachers to employ, but concurrent professional development on the teaching of writing as well. The use resulted in a more common approach to writing instruction, that being Writer's Workshop, as well as a deepened professional knowledge about writing pedagogy.

Curriculum. Participants in this study strongly indicated the need not just for a writing curriculum, but for one used consistently by all teachers within the school and the district as a whole. Participating teachers reported the benefits of using a common, predictable structure and common language for teachers and students as young students learn to write. The data of this study revealed that the *Units of Study* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013) for teaching writing provided the basis for the Writing Workshop model given that it served as a common resource available to all teachers in the district. Teachers in Focus Group 2, though, emphasized the need for a curriculum but did not necessarily advocate for this one in particular. Kimberly (FG1) stated that, "Whether it's

Units of Study or whatever the district decides, it needs to be a mandate; not an option.”

Colette (FG2) also stated that she would not be opposed to the district coming out with a different writing curriculum because she values trying new and different practices.

Kimberly expressed her appreciation for the program. “It’s just nice to have a curriculum that’s good. We’ve had it for a while. It’s nice to have something that’s all cohesive.

Before it was just everyone pulling stuff from everywhere.” Kimberly’s comments indicate that the teachers in this study had little in the way of instructional materials to support writing instruction before being provided with *Units of Study*. While the effects of the program were positive for these educators, they clearly called for the use of consistent curriculum across their schools and the district.

In summary, the participants in this study reported that their writing instructional practices have been positively affected by peer collaboration, writing instruction within the context of a Writer’s Workshop model, and the use of a common curriculum. While the focus group participants described many improvements over the past few years, they noted that writing instruction still presents challenges. They discussed that the current curriculum, or even Writer’s Workshop as a model, is not used consistently across grade levels within the district schools—and the seven focus group participants represented five different schools across the same district. Both groups noted the need for consistency in order to maximize student growth in writing over time. Teachers also spoke about the time it takes to learn how to teach with the current curriculum and the need for more organized professional learning. While focus group members valued peer collaboration, they reported inherent challenges in terms of available time for such work, inconsistent

program buy-in by all teachers, and the differing knowledge-base of their peers related to writing and writing instruction.

Implications for Practice

This study suggests several implications for practice in terms of early elementary writing instruction.

1. First and foremost, this research shows the positive effects of having a cohesive writing curriculum or program for teachers to follow. The teachers in this case all had the same program to use as a resource for teaching writing. This particular program provided the foundation for instruction, as well as professional learning for teachers within the context of the Writer's Workshop model. Teachers emphasized the need for either a program or curriculum, as well as its consistent use by teachers across grade levels, schools, and the district as a whole. The participants noted that the use of the same curricular materials in the district promoted conversations among educators about writing instruction, increased the amount of student writing, and provided common language for students and teachers surrounding writing in the classroom.
2. Secondly, the research indicates the need for further collaboration opportunities among teachers surrounding writing instruction. Teachers in the study valued working with their peers to learn more about teaching pedagogy and instructional strategies. Additional collaboration could occur in a variety of contexts, including planning lessons together and studying professional literature. Educators could also benefit from working with colleague mentors (grade level partners, literacy coaches, administrators) in order to improve instructional practices. Such a

sharing of research and its implications for instructional practices could have positive effects on student writing outcomes, as well as an overall increase in teacher knowledge about writing pedagogy.

3. Thirdly, teachers need focused professional learning about writing pedagogy. The respondents in this study clearly indicated a lack of preparation in teacher licensure programs for writing instruction. Education preparation programs at colleges and universities need to acknowledge this overwhelming need and provide opportunities for teachers to develop as writing teachers. For this to happen, states and certifying agencies must recognize the need as well. Learning to write and learning how to teach writing both take time and require specific coursework. This professional learning about evidence-based, best practices could include, but not be limited to pre-service university classes. It could also include in-service workshops, book studies, observations of other teachers, co-teaching with mentors, and continued discussions focused on improving instruction and student writing outcomes.
4. Finally, this research supports the use of the Writer's Workshop model for teaching writing. Process writing has a strong research base despite its absence in the Common Core State Standards (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). The workshop model provides a structure for instruction aligned with all five key principles identified by experts (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012), namely, teachers as writers, motivation and engagement in the writing process, clear, deliberate planning, daily writing instruction, and the scaffolded collaboration between teachers and students. Writer's Workshop also supports an emphasis on content (as opposed to

correctness), student choice in writing topics, and writing in a variety of genres.

The use of the Writer's Workshop model for teaching young writers clearly offers the necessary tools to provide vital instruction absent in many U.S. classrooms.

Limitations

This study has some limitations, particularly since its results are specific to the context of one urban, Midwestern school district, and as such, cannot be applied to the contexts of all schools, districts, teachers, or students across the United States. Likewise, all participants in the study are teachers within this district, so their professional experiences, students, and materials are inherently similar.

Secondly, although all schools across the district provided the same writing program, *Units of Study* (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013), for all teachers, its usage, consistency, and teacher professional learning surrounding the program was and is inconsistent. As an employee of the district, I was aware that some principals mandated the use of the program while others made it an optional curriculum. Similarly, some schools provided on-going professional learning opportunities for writing instruction, while others focused their efforts on different instructional contexts.

A third limitation involves aspects of the methodology, as teachers in the focus groups voiced their opinions about instructional practices, personal experiences, and student outcomes. However, their reports and claims were not backed up by any other evidence such as classroom observations or student work. By volunteering to participate in the focus group interviews, teachers admitted to an interest in writing instruction, and as such, their voices may not have been representative of all early elementary teachers in the district.

Finally, as an insider to much of the undertakings in the district, my role as the researcher in this study lends limitations. First, as a district literacy coach, I presented professional development sessions, lead book studies, co-taught writing lessons, and generally supported teachers as they implemented the *Units of Study*. In addition, the teachers in Focus Group 2 all participated in professional learning experiences with me to some extent, and their participation may have been influenced by knowing me as the researcher.

Implications for Further Research

Research should provide the field with possible answers to questions while also presenting ideas for future inquiries. The replication of this study with the addition of classroom observations of writing instruction and the examination of study writing would strengthen the methodology. By examining student outcomes and teachers' practices longitudinally, the impact of teachers' experiences on writing instruction could provide strong implications for the field. In addition, expanding the study to include various populations across educational settings would provide additional data on teachers' experiences and how those experiences affect instruction.

This study sought to determine personal and professional experiences of early elementary teachers as related to their writing instructional practices. The respondents clearly identified professional experiences related to writing, or the lack thereof, but their personal experiences as writers remain uncertain. Zumbrunn and Krause (2012) identified the need for teachers to be writers themselves. While the Writer's Workshop model discussed in this study required teachers to model writing for their students, the amount and kind of personal writing routinely accomplished by teachers was not investigated.

Future research could compare the instructional effectiveness of teachers who routinely write in their personal lives to those who do not so as to determine if the practice of writing has a positive effect on instruction, and whether better writers are naturally better teachers of writing.

A second question left unanswered by this research involves a particular population of teachers. For the district in this study, 11 of the 29 total elementary schools (including special program schools) provide some form of bilingual education. As a district employee, I know the message about writing instruction has been inconsistent across schools. Some but not all bilingual teachers used the *Units of Study* program, often because they were told that it was not appropriate instruction for their students. While the program is presented completely in English, the Writer's Workshop model itself is not language specific. Future research could specifically address the use of process writing in bilingual classrooms. Can the model be used to effectively teach writing as students bridge two languages? What additional professional learning opportunities would teachers require to make the model effective for bilingual learners?

Finally, this study raises several questions about teacher collaboration in terms of writing instructional practices and professional learning. The participating teachers clearly indicated that they value collaboration, yet the kinds of contexts that make learning most effective remain to be seen. Some questions here include: Do certain models of collaboration between teachers affect student learning outcomes more than others? What aspects of collaboration make it beneficial to instruction? The teachers in this study identified common planning and working with teacher mentors as effective

forms of collaboration. In what other contexts do teachers learn which positively affects instruction?

Final Thoughts

The National Commission on Writing (2003) dubbed writing in U.S. schools as the “Neglected R.” When compared to reading and mathematics instruction, that is certain the case. I envision literacy instruction more like Shel Silverstein’s (1976) character in, *The Missing Piece*: a circle with a bite missing, that bite being writing. Not only is writing neglected, it is often an absent instructional context in our schools. Writing is literally the missing piece of literacy instruction in elementary classrooms. The reasons may include other missing pieces like teacher education, instructional materials, teacher efficacy, and the ever-elusive time factor. No matter the cause though, at some point educators must acknowledge the importance of providing effective writing instruction for future generations.

Teachers represent the keys for this change. With mounting pressures competing for instructional time, it is more important than ever to emphasize the need to combine instructional contexts to maximize the efficiency of every available minute in the day. The reciprocity of reading and writing provides the motive for including more writing throughout the day, and for integrating it throughout the other content areas. To make this happen, teachers must realize its benefits and be given the tools to do so effectively. Providing teachers with research-based writing curriculums can be the first step in helping make these necessary changes. As teachers collaborate and develop their skills as writing teachers, students will undoubtedly benefit from their labor.

It has been nearly four decades since Donald Graves' groundbreaking research of first grade writers in which he showed the benefits of process writing with very young students. In 1981, he stated that, "...if teachers were comfortable with the teaching of writing, knew more about it, and responded effectively to the children, a wider range of development would ensue." (Newkirk, 2013a, p.41) What has changed in classrooms since then? Are teachers comfortable teaching writing? Do they know enough to respond effectively to students' needs? Many in the field have waited for and anticipated the "writing revolution" called for by the NCW in 2003. As of yet, writing instruction in early elementary classrooms remains inconsistent. Lucy Calkins, a researcher in Graves' original study and an expert in the field of writing pedagogy, emphasized the power of writing as follows:

In a world that is increasingly dominated by big corporations and big money, it is easy for individuals to feel silenced. No one is more apt to be silenced than children, who too often grow up being taught to be obedient more than to be wise, empathetic, and critical. The teaching of writing can change that. In a democracy, we must help young people grow up to know how to voice their ideas, know how to speak out for what is right and good. (Calkins & Colleagues, 2013, p.1)

The power of writing must be realized and harnessed by teachers in order to develop students' potentials as future citizens.

Research unmistakably shows the importance of writing instruction but we have yet to see the "revolution" take place. It seems clear that it will not happen from the top down. The United States and individual state governments have not made writing a focus. Because writing is not a part of high-stakes testing, it continues to be a neglected context

by districts and schools across the country. In addition, universities cannot mandate further requirements for future educators so writing coursework, if offered, remains noncompulsory.

If not from the top, the revolution will have to come from the bottom. The teachers in this study clearly value writing instruction. The role they and others play is critical. Teachers have the power to elevate writing to its proper place in the classroom next to reading and math instruction. It will take leadership and commitment, though to demand the materials and professional development needed to improve instructional practices. The participants in this study reported that by collaborating to implement a writing curriculum, they improved their instructional practices and increased the amount of writing in their classrooms. With the consistent support of schools and districts, this professional learning could be strengthened and continued, ultimately affecting student outcomes from early elementary classrooms through high school.

Time and money are often the challenges that must be overcome for change to take place. In this case, both could be assuaged by schools partnering with universities to offer professional learning opportunities. Teachers are required to complete continuing education hours so why not focus on writing? The time and money already spent for this professional development could be used alternatively to fill the gap left previously unmet for writing pedagogy. Such partnerships would not only benefit teachers' professional learning but also provide a venue for further research into writing instructional practices.

In the end, I believe that teachers will have to make the call for writing to be placed front and center. If not from the top, let's do it for ourselves. Let the revolution begin.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of primary grade (K-2) writing instruction. It is being completed as a partial requirement toward a doctoral degree in Reading and Language at the National College of Education, National Louis University.

This survey is voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. No personally identifiable information is captured and all responses will be aggregated and summarized into a report. The school district will not be given access to the survey responses.

If you would be willing to offer further insight and feedback on the issues highlighted within the survey, I am also seeking volunteers to participate in a focus group or interview. If you are interested, please provide contact information when offered that option at the end of the survey. Please note that if you choose to provide contact information, your survey responses will no longer be anonymous, although they will be kept strictly confidential.

I. General Information

Please circle your responses for the following items.

1. Indicate the number of years you have taught at the elementary level.

0-5
6-10
11-15
20+
2. Indicate what grade level you currently teach

K
1
2
3. Indicate the number of years teaching at this grade level: _____
4. What is your gender?

Male
Female
Gender non-conforming
Other (please specify)

5. With which of the following do you identify? Specify country or region in comments, if applicable.

African
 African-American/Black
 American Indian/Alaskan Native
 Asian (South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Central Asian)
 Hispanic/Latino (South and Central Americas and Caribbean)
 Middle Eastern
 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 White/Caucasian
 Biracial/Multiracial
 Some other race or ethnicity (please specify)

6. What is your age?

25 to 34
 35 to 44
 45 to 54
 55 to 64
 65 to 74
 75 or older
 24 or younger

II. Teacher Experiences Related to Writing Instruction

Rate the following experiences on a scale of 1-5 as they have affected your writing instruction, with (1) being not at all valuable and (5) being extremely valuable:

7. University/college teacher preparation courses focused on writing pedagogy (e.g., literacy methods, other methods courses, etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

8. University/college teacher preparation clinical experiences (e.g., student teaching, cooperating teacher input, etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

9. Writing instruction in high school

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

- | | | | | | |
|--|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 10. Writing instruction in general university/college-level coursework | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 11. Personal writing experiences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|--|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 12. Workshops or professional conference sessions on writing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 13. Working with an administrator | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|--|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 14. Working with a literacy coach or literacy specialist | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 15. Working with a colleague mentor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|------------------------|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 16. Peer collaboration | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|--|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 17. Observations of writing instruction during in-service teaching | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |
-
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---|----------|---|-----------|
| 18. Reading professional literature | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Not at all | | Somewhat | | Extremely |
| | valuable | | valuable | | valuable |

19. Curricular materials

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

III. Instructional Practices Used

Please indicate if this is an instructional practice for writing that you utilize in your classroom (yes/no). **If you answer yes**, please indicate the number of times per week you and your students engage in the practice.

20. Writer's workshop (mini-lessons, conferencing, independent writing, sharing)

Yes/No # of times per week _____

21. Daily 5 writing (working on writing)

Yes/No # of times per week _____

22. Guided reading (leveled books) with writing centers

Yes/No # of times per week _____

23. Basal (commercial curriculum) with writing centers

Yes/No # of times per week _____

24. Shared/interactive writing

Yes/No # of times per week _____

25. Content area writing instruction

Yes/No # of times per week _____

IV. Writing Instruction

26. Assess student writing, either formative or summative

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

27. Explicitly model writing strategies.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

28. Have students copy from models

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

29. Provide mini-lessons based on perceived student need for writing skills or processes.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

30. Conference with students about their writing.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

31. Model writing.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

32. Instruct using mentor texts.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

33. Teach strategies for planning (e.g., brainstorming, organizing).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

34. Teach strategies for drafting

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

35. Teach strategies for revising.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

36. Teach strategies for editing.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

37. Use a writing prompt (e.g., story starter, picture, physical object, etc.) to encourage writing.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

38. Teach handwriting skills.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

39. Teach spelling skills.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

40. Teach grammar skills.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

41. Teach capitalization and punctuation skills.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

42. Provide opportunities for journal/free writing (with or without prompts)

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

IV. Types of Student Writing Activities

Rate the following types of student writing activities on a scale of 1-5 with (1) being least important and (5) being most important:

43. Peer revision/editing

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

44. Use of writing checklists

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

45. Independent writing

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

46. Publishing writing

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

47. Writing in response to reading

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

48. Writing multiple genres

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

49. Writing from a prompt

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all valuable		Somewhat valuable		Extremely valuable

V. Student actions

50. Allow students to select their own writing topics.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

51. Have students engage in “planning” before writing.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

52. Have students “revise” their writing products.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

53. Have students share their writing with peers.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

54. Have students “publish” their writing. (Print or write it so that it can be shared with others.)

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

55. Have students use rubrics or checklists to evaluate their own writing or that of their peers.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

56. Encourage students to use “invented spelling” at any point during the writing process.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

57. Have students use writing to support reading (e.g., write about something they read).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

58. Have students use reading to support writing (e.g., read to inform their writing).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost always

59. Circle how many **minutes** a day your students typically spend writing. (This includes any extended writing beyond filling in worksheet pages.)

0-5

5-10

10-20

20-30

30+

VI. Miscellaneous

60. Have you had to give anything up (e.g., content, specific curriculum, etc.) in order to teach writing? If so, what?

61. What is your greatest challenge to providing effective writing instruction?

Thank you for completing this survey!

For the next phase of this research, I am seeking volunteers to participate in focus group and possibly also individual discussions about writing instruction. For this portion of the study, I am interested in hearing about teachers' writing experiences and how those experiences have affected writing instruction. All participating teachers will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. **If you would be willing to participate further in this study**, please provide your name, district email, and preferred phone number below.

Name:

Email address:

Preferred Phone Number:

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. Describe the quality of preparation for writing instruction you received in your teacher licensure program.
2. Identify and describe an effective professional learning experience you have received that has enhanced your writing instruction.
3. Identify and describe the writing practices you use in your classroom that you feel are the most valuable for students.
4. What is your greatest challenge to providing effective writing instruction?
5. Have you had to give anything up (e.g. content, specific curriculum, etc.) in order to teach writing?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent for Focus Group

My name is Amy Huftalin, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study titled, “**Elementary Teachers of Writing: Paths, Passions, and Practices**” occurring from January-May 2017. The purpose of this study is to understand the personal and professional experiences of writing teachers. This study seeks to research the experiences of teachers related to writing, and how those experiences may affect classroom instruction.

This form outlines the purpose of the study, provides a description of your involvement, and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Amy Huftalin, doctoral student, at National Louis University, Chicago. Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore the experiences and writing instructional practices of teachers and *not* to evaluate teaching. Participation in this study will include the following:

Participation in one focus group interview in which several teachers will meet to discuss experiences and practices related to writing instruction

- Amy Huftalin will moderate the group discussion.
- The group discussion will be audiotaped.
- Kim Wagner, an NLU doctoral student, will attend the discussion for the sole purpose of taking written notes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform writing instructional practices. However, participants’ identities will in no way be revealed as data and findings will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that can be connected to individual participants. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher Amy Huftalin will secure surveys and interview notes in a locked cabinet in her home office, and she alone will have access to this data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits for participant--nothing greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the school district when looking to refine writing instruction in elementary schools, as well as to the field of literacy in general.

Upon request, you may receive a summary of results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, Amy Huftalin at ahuftalin@gmail.com to request results from this study. In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Amy Huftalin by email or phone: 815-289-1418.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Ruth Quiroa, dissertation chair, at rquiroa@nl.edu, or the co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Review Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: shaunti.knauth@nl.edu; phone: 312-261-3526; or Dr. Carol Burg; email: cburg@nl.edu; phone: 813-397-2109. Co-chairs offices are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

Follow-up Email to Focus Group Participants

Dear Participant,

I want to thank you again for participating in my focus group. I have been digging through the data and wonder if you have any other thoughts you could add.

Could you kindly share the reason you agreed to be part of the focus group and any other thoughts you had about the discussion or experience itself? Do you have anything else to add to the discussion questions?

1. Describe the quality of preparation for writing instruction you received in your teacher licensure program.
2. Identify and describe an effective professional learning experience you have received that has enhanced your writing instruction.
3. Identify and describe the writing practices you use in your classroom that you feel are the most valuable for students.
4. What is your greatest challenge to providing effective writing instruction?
5. Have you had to give anything up (e.g. content, specific curriculum, etc.) in order to teach writing?

I really appreciate your help! This will help me get a better sense of all the data I have collected!